The Green Rope

by J. S. Fletcher

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THE GREEN ROPE

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NEW YORK: ALFRED · A · KNOPF

THE GREEN ROPE

BY

J. S. FLETCHER

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NEW YORK MCMXXVII

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THE GREEN ROPE

CHAPTER I

A LENGTH OF GREEN ROPE

Hanson, Superintendent of Police at Norlanstead, was one of those men who have a constitutional objection to early rising. Punctilious to the last degree in the discharge of his duties, he saw no reason—Norlanstead being a quiet country town in which there was comparatively little to do—why those duties should drag him out of bed before eight o'clock; his notion of a hard working-day was that it should begin at ten and end at five. All the same, Hanson, who lived in a comfortable little villa on the outskirts of the town, had a telephone fixed in his bedroom . . . and one March morning, at precisely six o'clock, two hours before his usual time of rising, he heard the sharp tinkle of its bell, and on the instant was out of his bed.

"Well?" he demanded. "Who's that?"

"Roberts, caretaker at the Castle. Is that the Superintendent? Mr. Hanson!—there's a woman lying dead in the Castle Grounds!—I found her myself, a few minutes ago. She's—she's been murdered!"

It was characteristic of Hanson that he let out

no sudden exclamation in response to this startling announcement. Instead, he asked a sharp, plain question.

"How do you know that, Roberts?"

"She's been strangled, Mr. Hanson! The rope's round her neck now!"

"Do you know her?" asked Hanson.

"No, sir! She's a well-dressed woman—a lady, I think. Can you come down, sir? I've sent a boy up to the police-station."

"I'm coming just now," replied Hanson. "Don't let anybody move or even touch her till I get there. Listen!—who's the nearest doctor to you? Dr. Waterhouse? Send somebody for him at once. I'll be with you in a few minutes."

When Hanson said a few minutes, he meant a few minutes. Within five he had huddled on some necessary clothes and covered the lot with an old ulster; within ten he was backing his small run-about car out of its shed in his garden; a minute more, and he was traversing the still sleeping town. The old Norman castle, now a show-place, the resort of sightseers, tourists, and antiquaries, lay on a promontory of land that stretched out from the town's market-square. Entering on the connecting road, Hanson caught up one of his policemen, a sergeant, who had evidently hurried from the police-station on receiving the caretaker's summons. He pulled up the car and bade him jump in.

"Heard what Roberts had found down there?" he asked as they moved off again.

"Only that it's the dead body of a woman," answered the sergeant. "The lad who came up didn't know more."

"Roberts says she's been murdered," remarked Hanson.

The sergeant made a face. Then he whistled.

"Whew! Murdered?" he exclaimed.

"Strangled!" said Hanson. "Roberts says the rope's round her neck now!"

"Bless me!" murmured the sergeant. "Murder! I never remember a murder case in these parts. And in the Castle, too!"

"I've always said it's a great mistake to leave those Castle Grounds open to such a late hour," said Hanson. "They ought to be closed before dusk. However, the Corporation wouldn't listen. . . ."

"There's Dr. Waterhouse!" interrupted the sergeant. "Coming out of his house."

Hanson stopped his car again; the doctor got in, giving the two occupants a questioning look.

"What is it?" he asked laconically.

"Roberts says—a case of murder," replied Hanson. "A woman in the Castle Grounds—strangled, he says."

The doctor made no reply; a moment more, and Hanson drove into the old Castle Yard—up to the

caretaker's lodge. A woman, anxious, frightened, came out of the doorway.

"Where's your husband, Mrs. Roberts?" asked Hanson. "With—it?"

The woman pointed to the great central mass of the ruins, rising high above them.

"It's round there, Mr. Hanson," she said in a hushed voice. "Back of the keep, near the bandstand. Roberts has just taken a rug there to lay over her, poor thing! But of course, she's quite dead—been dead some time, in my opinion."

"You've seen her then?" asked Hanson.

"Oh yes, sir!—Roberts, he fetched me at once, when he found her."

"Do you know who she is?"

"I don't, sir, nor does my husband. But I've an idea—just an idea—that she's a lady I've seen in the town once or twice of late."

Hanson turned away, motioning his companions to follow. At the corner of the keep they met the caretaker, coming towards them. Hanson went straight to the point with him, wasting no words.

"Now, Roberts!—how came you to find her?" he asked.

"Just accident, Mr. Hanson," replied Roberts. "I'm always up very early of a morning, and when it's fine I take a look round. I was just looking round this morning, and—well, I caught sight of her. And of course—but here it is, gentlemen!"

He led them abruptly round the foot of the massive, four-square tower, and pointed to a recumbent figure, covered over with a gaily coloured rug, which lay on the edge of an asphalted space in the centre of which rose a band-stand. The four men stopped for an instant, staring.

"Just where I found her!" whispered Roberts. "Never touched her at all, Mr. Hanson. I fetched that rug and covered her over——"

The doctor moved forward suddenly and, drawing the rug aside, revealed the figure of a smartly-dressed woman, apparently of about thirty to thirty-five years of age, whose features would have looked handsome in their stillness but for the distortion caused by the manner of her death. Round her shapely throat, and tightly knotted at the nape of her neck, was a green rope, slender, but strong as wire. The doctor, after a moment's examination, turned to Hanson.

"If I were you, Superintendent," he said in a low voice, "I should cut that rope off in such a way as to leave the knot intact—do you see that that knot is tied in a peculiar fashion? If anybody will give me a sharp knife . . ."

A moment later he rose from his knees, handing the severed rope to Hanson.

"You ought to be able to trace the ownership of that," he said significantly. "It's colour is uncommon, for one thing—green! Do you see that

it's a length of rope that's been cut from a longer length, a coil? And as I say, the knot is made in an unusual way."

"She's been strangled, of course?" suggested Hanson.

"Certainly, and by somebody who did it very cleverly," assented the doctor. "I should say she was sitting in the corner of that seat when the rope was slipped round her—she'd have no chance! A determined man."

Hanson was looking at the asphalt-covered expanse on which they stood.

"Shows no footmarks, this stuff," he observed, meditatively. "You think it was done here?—not that she was carried here from some other place?"

"I think it was here," answered the doctor. "She probably came here with the murderer after dark; they sat down here; he strangled her here. I should say from a mere cursory examination that she's been dead about eight hours—that would fix the time of the murder at about ten o'clock last night. The Castle Grounds are closed at ten o'clock, aren't they, Roberts?" he added, turning to the caretaker.

Roberts first nodded his head and then shook it.

"That's the time, sir, from March 21st to September 21st," he replied. "But you know, doctor, this place is too big for me to keep an eye on everything! I've told the gentlemen of the Cor-

poration many a time that although I close the gates and turn off the gas-lamps at ten o'clock, I know there are people who hang about inside—they can get out, and get in, for that matter, over that low wall down yonder by the Barbican. That wall ought to be raised, gentlemen!"

"You saw nothing of this woman last night?" asked the superintendent.

"Nothing, Mr. Hanson: I don't know her. My wife says she thinks she's seen her in the town, but she can't be sure."

"There may be something on her by which she can be identified," said the doctor. "If there's a pocket, now!"

He stooped again, moving back the rug, and suddenly his quick eye caught sight of the handle of a bag, projecting from beneath a fold of the gown. "Here's something!" he went on, drawing out and handing to the superintendent a smart morocco leather hand-bag. "Perhaps in that—cards, letters, eh?—you'd better look."

He and the other men gathered round while Hanson opened the bag. There were a good many things in it—several letters amongst them; it was a letter that he drew out first.

"If this is hers, we know who she is now!" he said. "There you are! *Miss Clara Gilkison, Holly Bank, Swarthington, near Norlanstead.* These other letters—see, all similarly addressed. And here's a visiting-card or two—same name and

address. Well, Swarthington's near enough, but I never heard of Miss Gilkison—she must have come there lately. There's one thing I notice at once, doctor!—this murder hasn't been for robbery. Look here—bank-notes, Treasury notes, silver—a fair lot of money there!"

"And there's rings on her hands, sir," remarked the sergeant, "and a gold chain round her neck. One of the rings has diamonds in it."

Hanson hastily bundled letters and money back into the hand-bag and thrust the whole into one of the capacious pockets of his ulster.

"Well, well!" he said. "We'd better get her removed to the mortuary. See to it, sergeant, at once—get the ambulance. Stand by her, Roberts, till they come for her." He motioned the doctor aside. "You don't think it could possibly be a case of suicide, doctor?" he asked as they walked away.

The doctor allowed himself to smile, cynically.

"Oh, dear me, no!" he answered. "Impossible! Where have you put that length of green rope? In your pocket?—well, now, look at that knot! Whoever tied that knot knows something about such things that isn't known to most people. It's a knot that won't give! I should say—I may be wrong—but I should say that the man who tied that knot has been a sailor."

Hanson, who had drawn the length of rope from

his pocket, let it hang from his hand while he stared at it.

"That rope licks me, doctor!" he said suddenly. "I never saw a piece of rope like that before! What is it? Bright green in colour, and uncommonly strong, slender as it is. Foreign look about it, I think."

"Possibly," agreed the doctor. "Well, it's a clue, Hanson! And in my opinion this has been a particularly fiendish murder." He remained silent a moment or two while Hanson thoughtfully coiled up the rope and restored it to his pocket. "You'll have your hands full over this!" he added. "Full enough!"

"Yes!" assented Hanson, mechanically. "Yes, I suppose so. Murder, eh?—unusual. Oh yes—well, you'll want to make a further examination, of course, doctor, after we've removed her—yes, to be sure. Oh, you'd like Dr. Briggs to meet you there?—it shall be done. Yes—full enough, no doubt, oh yes!"

He went back to the caretaker, who was walking about with his hands behind his back.

"Roberts!" he said. "You can't remember this woman being seen in company with anybody in the grounds here last night? Think, now!"

"No, sir! I've been thinking—I'm thinking now," replied Roberts. "I was in and about here most of last evening from say six o'clock to dusk,

and now and then after that, and I've no recollection of this poor lady. There were a fair lot of people in the grounds last night—it was a fine evening for the time of year, and then, of course, it had been market-day, and there's always a lot of the country people stop in after market. No, I've no recollection of her at all, Mr. Hanson—none!" he added, nodding at the still figure. "I should have remembered her if I'd seen her. She must have come in here after dark."

"Did you notice any suspicious characters about?" inquired Hanson. "Anybody strange?"

Roberts's face suddenly lightened.

"Well, not at night, Mr. Hanson," he replied, "but just before tea-time yesterday afternoon, I did see a man who was certainly a stranger hereabouts—at least, he looked like one. A sea-farer, I should say he was—dark-skinned, black-haired fellow, in a blue serge suit, and with gold rings in his ears; I set him down for a foreigner. Respectable-looking, to be sure! He was strolling round with his pipe in his mouth, examining the ruins."

"You'd know him again?" asked Hanson. "Very good!—may be something in that; we must inquire in the town about him. And about this Miss Gilkison, too—dear, dear!"

"Here's your men with the ambulance, sir," said the caretaker.

Hanson superintended the removal of the

murdered woman's body to the mortuary, and after giving some instructions to his subordinates at the police-station, hastened home to make his toilet and get his breakfast. These necessary duties performed, he once more got into his car and set out on another journey. And on this he carried the dead woman's hand-bag with him—the length of green rope he had already locked up in a safe at his office.

CHAPTER II

THE UNFINISHED LETTER

The village which Hanson reached after a ten minutes' quick run lay in a quiet well-wooded valley. He knew it well, and always thought of it as one of those typical English Arcadias in which, whatever the real facts of life may be as then lived, there ought, from the surface of things, to be nothing but rustic peace and prosperity. An old, grey church; a scarcely less ancient manor-house; substantial farmsteads in the midst of bursting rick-yards and well-stocked orchards; trim cottages set in gay flower-gardens; great masses of oak and ash, beech and chestnut—all this, thought Hanson, who, although he was a big, brawny fellow of six feet, had a strong spice of sentiment in his good-natured constitution, was not the setting for a case of murder and mystery.

Hanson pulled up his car at the first house in the village; a cottage of a rather more pretentious sort than its fellows and having over its door, surmounted by a crown, the insignia of the county constabulary. This was the residence of the village policeman, Skelton, and as the car stopped, Skelton himself came out of the creeper-

clad porch—a middle-aged, clean-shaven, sharp-eyed man who had something of a gipsy look about him. He was shuffling into his tunic as he came; Hanson had evidently interrupted him in the process of making his official toilet for the day.

"Skelton," said the superintendent as the constable stepped to the side of the car, "do you know anything of a Miss Gilkison who lives here at Swarthington?"

Skelton gave his superior a quick, questioning look. Hanson knew what he was thinking—that possibly Miss Gilkison was wanted for something.

"Yes, sir!" he answered promptly. "She's a lady—youngish lady—who took that nice little house on the Cardale Road—Holly Bank it's called—a short time since. I don't know who she is, nor where she came from. Seems to be nicely off—always smartly dressed and that sort of thing."

"Live alone?" inquired Hanson.

"Yes, sir—except for a woman who goes in of a morning to do the house-work. That's Mrs. Burton—she lives near Holly Bank."

Hanson looked round. But there was no one near—still, he sank his voice as he leaned over the side of the car.

"Well, Skelton, here's bad news about her! She was found dead in the Castle Grounds this morning! And there's no doubt she's been murdered!"

The policeman drew back, staring.

"You don't say so, sir!" he exclaimed at last. "Murdered? That'll have been for what she had on her, no doubt! I've noticed she wore a good deal of jewellery."

"No!" said Hanson. "Not a thing had been touched. I've got her hand-bag here—there's a good deal of loose money in it, in notes and silver. The murderer could have helped himself to that and to her jewelry, too—but he'd taken nothing. There's a latch-key in the hand-bag—I conclude it's of the house-door. Get in, Skelton; we'll go down there."

The policeman got in, and Hanson drove slowly through the village until his car reached its centre at the cross-roads.

"Round to the right, sir," said Skelton. "That's Holly Bank, on the left—the last house. And that," he continued when they had gone a little way, "is Mrs. Burton's cottage—that's she standing at the gate."

He pointed to a buxom-looking country-woman who stood at the gate of a garden, staring intently at the car and its uniformed occupants. She continued to stare as they came up. As the car passed, she came out into the road and followed it, and when Hanson pulled it to a halt at the gate of Holly Bank she hurried forward.

"Is there anything amiss, gentlemen?" she asked anxiously. "I ask, because I've been here

to Miss Gilkison's twice already, and I can't make her hear. As a rule she has the door open for me at eight o'clock and I walk straight in, but when I came this morning it was fast, and still fast when I tried it again at nine, and though I knocked loud and long I got no answer. And she didn't say anything to me when I saw her yesterday about being away for the night."

"What time did you see her yesterday?" inquired Hanson.

"At noon, sir, just before she set off for Norlanstead," replied Mrs. Burton. "She didn't have her dinner at home yesterday; she said she'd get it in town. It was twelve o'clock when she left here —she was in a hurry to get to Norlanstead before the bank closed at one."

"She told you she was going to the bank, did she?" suggested Hanson.

"She mentioned it, sir. Now, is there anything wrong, gentlemen?—I've been that anxious, and when I saw it was police——"

"You may as well know, mistress," replied Hanson. "Miss Gilkison's been found dead, and under very suspicious circumstances!"

The woman's homely face blanched and a tear started.

"You don't say so!" she murmured. "Poor thing!—and her that full of life, and everything that she could wish for! You surely don't mean that somebody's done her an injury?"

"If you want the unpleasant truth, I'm afraid she was murdered, Mrs. Burton," answered Hanson. "But now, just keep that to yourself for the time being—it'll get out soon enough, but I don't want it spreading this minute. Look here, do you know if this is the latch-key of the front door there?"

"Yes, sir, that's it," assented the woman. "I saw her put it in her bag when she went away yesterday—I left at the same time she did. Dear, dear! Is there anything I can do, gentlemen?"

Hanson replied that there was nothing at present, and motioning Skelton to follow him, he went up the sloping garden to the front door of the house and, applying the latch-key, stood, a moment later, in a small hall-parlour, from which various doors and a balconied staircase communicated with rooms above and below. There was a strange stillness in the place; Hanson, glancing at the clock on the mantelpiece, saw that it had stopped at five-thirty.

"I wanted to see what there might be here in the way of any letters, Skelton," he said. "I've already examined all those I found in the handbag, and there's nothing of any importance—nothing that gives any information or affords any clue. That looks a likely place," he went on, crossing to an old-fashioned bureau that stood in a corner of the room with the desk down. "Hullo!—

here's a letter begun and not finished—Miss Gilkison's writing, no doubt."

He picked up a sheet of notepaper which lay on a blotting pad, and hastily glanced over the few lines of large, sprawling handwriting across it:—

"Holly Bank, Swarthington,

"Norlanstead: March 27th, 1923.

"My dear Mousie—I've just made a very startling discovery and one that you'll be deeply interested to here about! Who on earth do you think I encountered the other day, in this out-of-the-way spot of all places? You'd never guess! Well!—the notorious . . ."

Hanson laid the unfinished letter down with an exclamation of annoyance. If only the writer had finished that last sentence! There might have been a clue of immense importance in the name she evidently had in mind. But at the word notorious she had dropped her pen—there it lay. And there, too, was an envelope, ready stamped—but innocent of any address, though it had plainly been intended as receptacle for the letter. Vexing! Who was it that was notorious—and for what was he, or she, entitled to such a designation? And who was the correspondent affectionately styled Mousie?

"Lot to learn yet about Miss Gilkison!" he muttered. "Long row to hoe, Skelton! Well, let's have a look through this bureau!"

But in the various drawers and compartments of the bureau Hanson found nothing to help him. Miss Gilkison was plainly not the sort of person who accumulates correspondence, though she seemed to have been particular and methodical about preserving her receipts. The bureau yielded nothing, nor did a first search of the house. And after carefully locking the house up, Hanson walked down the road to Mrs. Burton's cottage.

"How long had Miss Gilkison lived at Holly Bank?" he inquired.

"Since about last October, sir," replied Mrs. Burton.

"Then she'd know people in the village," said Hanson. "Had she any particular friend?"

"Why, she was most friendly with Mrs. Tewkesbury, sir," answered Mrs. Burton. "Mrs. Tewkesbury, she's the wife of the head-gardener at the Hall: you can see their house from my front gate —that's it at the corner of the Hall gardens. You'll notice there's a path across the field there, from the front of Holly Bank to the Hall—Miss Gilkison used to go across there to see Mrs. Tewkesbury pretty often, and Mrs. Tewkesbury would come to see her—the path was convenient for them."

"You think Mrs. Tewkesbury would know more about her than anybody else in the village?" asked Hanson.

"Oh, I'm sure she would, sir. Miss Gilkison and

Mrs. Tewkesbury were very thick!" declared Mrs. Burton. "Never a day passed but what they saw each other."

Leaving Skelton with the car, Hanson walked across the field to the head-gardener's house. Mrs. Tewkesbury, a middle-aged woman, whose appearance suggested that she had some time been a lady's maid, received him with suspicion and heard his news with horror. But when it came to a matter of question and answer, she confessed herself of little use.

"We were friendly, you might say very friendly, she and I," she said, "but I really don't know a great deal about her. She'd been in service as maid to some very rich lady, who died last year and left her a lot of money——"

"What do you mean by a lot?" interrupted Hanson.

"Well, of course I don't know," replied Mrs. Tewkesbury, "but from what I saw, and gathered, and what she told me, I fancy she'd about five or six hundred a year. Anyway, as soon as she got this legacy, she came here—she'd seen Holly Bank advertised somewhere, and she came and inspected and took it on a lease—seven years she had it for."

"Did she ever have visitors there?" inquired Hanson.

"I don't remember her ever having any, except her brother, just after Christmas. He's butler at

Lord Marchendyke's, in Lincolnshire—I can give you his address."

"What did she do with herself?" asked Hanson.

"Oh, well, she'd her house, and her garden, and she read a bit, and did a bit of fancy work, and visited a bit—she seemed quite happy. Very lively and cheerful disposition, poor thing!"

"Do you know if she went much into Norlanstead? I don't remember ever seeing her there, myself."

"She didn't go there very often. Sometimes. I know she was going there yesterday, because I saw her in the morning and she asked if there was anything she could do for me."

"Do you know if she was going to meet anybody there?"

"She said nothing to me. I only saw her for a minute or two."

Hanson thought of the unfinished letter, which he had brought away from Holly Bank.

"Have you heard Miss Gilkison speak—lately, I mean—of meeting anybody about here that she was surprised to see?" he asked.

But Mrs. Tewkesbury shook her head; clearly she had no recollection of any such communication.

"No!" she answered. "Never heard anything of that sort."

"I suppose you've heard her mention friends of hers?—People she's known?"

"Sometimes she's mentioned such people—yes."

"Have you ever heard her speak of a friend of hers, a woman friend, I should say, that she called Mousie?"

"No!" replied Mrs. Tewkesbury. "Never!"

"Well," said Hanson, "you might give me the brother's address, and I'll wire to him. It's a queer case this, Mrs. Tewkesbury, and all the queerer because so far I haven't a notion of the murderer's motive. It certainly wasn't robbery. And—it was a peculiarly cruel murder. You don't know of anything you can tell me that would help?"

But Mrs. Tewkesbury could think of nothing just then, and Hanson left her and went back to Holly Bank and his car.

"I've learnt nothing there, Skelton," he said, "and I shall have to hurry home and set to work in the town. Now listen here—you may as well make the matter known in the village. Keep your ears open as to what's said, and make any inquiries you think proper. If you hear anything, especially about Miss Gilkison's movements yesterday afternoon—there may have been Swarthington people marketing in Norlanstead who saw her. And if you hear anything, come at once to me."

Then Hanson drove back to Norlanstead, wondering about various matters that had presented themselves. There was the seafaring-looking man

with rings in his ears, of whom Roberts had spoken; he was not inclined to think much about him, seeing that the dead woman's property was intact. But he was keenly anxious to discover the correspondent known as Mousie—she might have some idea as to the identity of the person referred to by Miss Gilkison as notorious—Mousie must be found. And meanwhile there were investigations to make on the spot; he was busy making them all that afternoon and evening. He had learnt very little when at last he went home to a belated supper. But as he turned into his gate he met Skelton—and Skelton's dark, shrewd face was full of news.

CHAPTER III

TALK OF THE VILLAGE

Hanson, being a bachelor, usually ate his meals in solitude; on this occasion he placed Skelton at his table, gave him a drink, and bade him talk while he himself went on with his supper.

"You've heard something?" he suggested as he picked up his knife and fork. "Something important, eh?"

"I've heard a lot, sir, since you left me this morning," answered the policeman. "Some of it, a mere shred, I'd had an inkling of before; some of it's new. Seems very significant to me, anyhow—I don't know what you'll make of it."

"Well?" said Hanson. "What's it come to?"

Skelton, out of habit, glanced at the closed door, and drawing his chair nearer to Hanson, lowered his voice.

"It's a pretty serious matter—or may be," he said. "You know the Crossways Farm, at Swarthington?—the big farmhouse at the Cross Roads, near the Ploughboy Inn—Mr. Geoffrey Marris has it."

"I know Marris—by sight, anyhow," assented Hanson. "Farms his own land, doesn't he?"

"That's so," said Skelton. "He bought that farm when part of the Swarthington estate was sold, two or three years ago. He's a bit of a queer sort of man, Marris—he's well-to-do, and always has been, but eccentric in some ways—likes his own way. It was always wondered in the village why he never married—instead of getting married he was for ever running after girls, but nothing ever got any further with him in the marrying way. And then, all of a sudden, just about the time he bought that farm he surprised everybody by marrying a village girl!"

"What do you mean by a village girl?" asked Hanson.

"Well, her father had been a labourer, in Marris's employ—just an ordinary day labourer. He was dead—left a widow, Sabina Clay, and this girl, Anne. The girl grew up a fine strapping wench—she's a very handsome young woman now that she's Mrs. Geoffrey Marris and well dressed. But the marriage was a surprise—nobody had the least idea that Marris was going to marry her."

"How old was she—and how old was he?" inquired Hanson.

Skelton reflected.

"Well, Marris, he'd be five-and-forty, at least," he answered. "Anne Clay would be eighteen when they were married, rather over two years ago. It wasn't quite a case of May and December, as the

saying is, but there was a lot of talk about it in the village."

"Any children?" asked Hanson.

"So far, no! And it's pretty well known that, after a bit, Marris began to neglect her. Those who know him well say he's the sort that would tire of any woman in three months. I've never heard that there was any quarrelling or anything of that sort—only that he'd just sort of cooled off. And then, last autumn this Miss Gilkison came to the village."

Hanson, who was eating lamb cutlets, helped himself to another.

"Ah!" he said calmly. "I thought you were coming to that, Skelton! Well?"

"Well, I never saw much of the poor lady," continued Skelton, "but she was, of course, a fine woman and good-looking, and they say very pleasant to talk to, and had a clever tongue. Well, to be sure, in a small place like ours, everybody gets to know everybody, and as Marris has land at the back of Holly Bank, of course he soon got to know this Miss Gilkison. Everybody knew that—but it's astonishing how some of our village folk can hold their tongues as tight as a vice till something crops up to loosen 'em! I've heard more to-day in a few hours than I'd heard before in as many months!"

"This affair has loosened their tongues, has it?" remarked Hanson.

"To some purpose! They're all talking down yonder," answered Skelton, waving his hand in the direction of Swarthington, "as fast as ever they can lay their lips to it! There's two inns there at Swarthington, as you know, Superintendent, the Ploughboy and the Woolsack—I'll bet my last shilling that they're full at this minute of gossipers, retailing the stuff that they've kept secret till now! And at the cottages'll be the same!"

"Well—and what's it come to?" inquired Hanson, for the second time.

"The talk is that from very soon after she came to Holly Bank, Marris has been carrying on with this Miss Gilkison! Now that the poor thing's dead, it appears that no end of people have things to tell about her—and him. I've gathered up all sorts of tales during this afternoon. They say that Marris and Miss Gilkison used to go walking together a good deal in the woods; that's one tale. Another is that she used to meet him at a quiet spot outside the village, and go off with him in his car. Several people, men and women, have assured me that they can personally testify to both these facts—people, you know, who were working on the land, and saw these meetings. That's what you might call common knowledge. But a man that I know very well, and on whose word I can rely, told me, just before I started out to see you, that he knows for a fact that Marris used to visit this

Miss Gilkison of an evening and spend hours there at Holly Bank, and that he didn't go in by the front door, either! This man (he's a game-watcher on the estate) had seen him many a time come to the house through the woods at the back and enter by the door in the back-yard wall. So——"

"A moment!" interrupted Hanson. He rang a hand-bell that stood at his side, and signed to Skelton to wait until the trim maid who answered it had removed the cutlets and replaced them by a milk pudding. "It comes to this—you were going to say, Skelton"—he went on, as he dipped a spoon into the dish, "it comes to just this—that in Swarthington there's a distinct belief that Marris and Miss Gilkison had been what village folk call carrying-on for some time! Eh?"

"That's it, sir!" agreed Skelton. "That is what I was going to say. That is the common impression."

"Very well," said Hanson. "We'll suppose—we don't know anything whatever about it, of course!—But we'll suppose they were. Now then—what about Marris's wife?"

"That's just what I'm coming to, sir," replied Skelton. "I've got some information about that. A woman came to me late this afternoon and told me that not long ago she was helping in the spring cleaning at Marris's, and Sabina Clay was there too, and she was rating her daughter about Marris

and Miss Gilkison, and young Mrs. Marris, this woman says, was sulky and sullen about it, and said some vengeful things about Miss Gilkison; indeed, according to her, both mother and daughter made threats about what they'd do to her, if they got the chance!"

Hanson swallowed the last mouthful of pudding, and pushing his plate away, folded his arms on the table and gave his visitor a keen look.

"Skelton!" he said. "You know these Swarthington people well! You've lived amongst 'em all your life, haven't you? Now, what's their belief about this murder—out with it?"

Skelton gave his questioner a wry smile.

"Well, there's no two opinions about it, sir!" he answered. "They think that the poor woman was put to an end by either young Mrs. Marris or her mother, or by both of 'em together! That's it! And I've discovered that both were in Norlanstead all last evening until a very late hour—eleven o'clock!"

Hanson's face changed. He got up from the table, and going over to the mantelpiece took up a pipe and began to fill it from a tobacco-jar.

"Ah!" he said. "Now that is something important! How did you find that out? And is it reliable information?"

"Oh, it's reliable enough, Mr. Hanson!" asserted the policeman. "I had it at first hand. I

don't know if you're acquainted with our carrier —Wexley? He's the parish clerk and sexton at Swarthington, and he has a small shop and a carrier's business as well. I saw him this evening, and he told me that last night he was kept very late at Norlanstead and didn't get away with his cart till close on eleven o'clock. Just outside the town here—not so far from your house it would be—Sabina Clay and young Mrs. Marris stopped him and asked him for a ride. Of course he took them into his cart. They explained that they'd waited in town for Mr. Marris, only to find at last that he'd taken his car out of the garage and gone away without them. Sabina, according to Wexley, grumbled all the way to Swarthington about that, and rated her daughter for letting Marris neglect her. Young Mrs. Marris cried. Wexley was glad, he said, to get rid of them for, in addition to her bad temper, Sabina Clay had been drinking."

"Is she that sort?" asked Hanson.

"She's fond of her glass at any time," replied Skelton, "and now and then she takes too much—I've had trouble with her before to-day. However, that's where those two were last night—here in town till nearly eleven o'clock."

"What sort of a woman is this Sabina Clay—in appearance, I mean?" inquired Hanson. "I don't think I know her."

"She's a tall, lean, scraggy woman, strong as a

horse!'' said Skelton. ''A hard-working woman, I'll say that for her. Been, in her time, a good-looking woman. You may have seen her about—she's a bold-looking woman with bright black eyes. Fears nobody and nothing, and has a tongue like a razor!''

''You say the daughter, Mrs. Marris, is a strongly-built young woman?'' asked Hanson.

''Very fine young woman indeed, sir, is Mrs. Marris!'' replied Skelton. ''Past me to think how a man could sort of neglect her as they say Marris has done of late! Of course, he married beneath him, and as he's a cleverish man himself it may be they've nothing to talk about. But——''

Hanson showed no interest in the relations of Marris and his wife. He was thinking of more immediate matters.

''We shall have to trace the movements of those two women while they were in town last night,'' he said. ''Now look here, Skelton—I shall come down to Swarthington again to-morrow morning—you be ready for me at 10 o'clock or thereabouts. If you hear more in the meantime, keep it to yourself.''

Skelton went away, and Hanson sat for some little time reflecting on the news he had just heard. Was it possible that the idea of those chattering, scandal-loving village folk was right, and that this was a crime arising out of jealousy? It might be—he knew how easily primitive passion is

aroused amongst rustic populations. It might be the neglected young wife; it might be the mother; it might be both, in collusion. If Miss Gilkison had met her fate at the hands of these two women, the presence of money in her hand-bag and jewellery on her person at the time of the discovery of her body would be explained, and the fact established that robbery had not been the murderer's motive.

The thought of the money in the hand-bag reminded Hanson that the hand-bag itself lay close at hand in a locked drawer of his desk; he had placed it there on returning from Swarthington. He now took it out and re-examined the contents more particularly. In doing so he made a discovery. In one of the pockets of the hand-bag he found a cheque-book on the Norlanstead Old Bank and learned from the last counterfoil that on the previous day, March 27, Miss Gilkison had drawn a cheque payable to herself for £125. On seeing this, Hanson once more counted the money in the hand-bag. There were three five-pound notes; five one-pound Treasury notes; four ten-shilling Treasury notes, and fifteen shillings in silver—£22 15*s.* o*d.* in all. Where was the other £100? But upon reflection he realized that this was not an eminently sensible question to ask himself. The real question was: Had Miss Gilkison that £100 in her possession at the time she was attacked?

While Hanson was wondering how he could find

a satisfactory solution of that problem, the police-sergeant, Turner, whom he had picked up on his way to the Castle that morning, was announced. Turner, like Skelton, had news.

"I've traced some of the lady's movements yesterday afternoon and evening, sir," he said. "In fact, I think she's accounted for pretty well up to a certain point, but beyond that I haven't been able to trace her at all. She called at the Old Bank in the Market-Place at 12.50," continued Turner, consulting a note-book. "She there drew out £125 in bank-notes and Treasury notes; I've got the numbers of the bank-notes. She then called at Pawson's the fishmonger's, and gave an order for something to be sent to Holly Bank one day next week. She then got into the bus at the Crown Hotel and went down to Frimsgate Station. She there took a return ticket for Selsborough, and she left for Selsborough on the 1.45 train. She came back to Friarsgate Station by the train that gets here at 8.57, and the ticket-collecter at Friarsgate is the last man I've seen so far who saw her last night. He says that he collected the tickets at the outer door of the station; he remembers Miss Gilkison distinctly—in fact, he knew her quite well by sight, and her name—and he says that instead of getting into the Crown bus, which was waiting there, on taking the road to the town, she crossed the open space in front of the station and

went down the steps into Cordwainer's Walk. That's the last I've learnt, sir—up to now."

"Cordwainer's Walk leads to the foot of the Castle hill, doesn't it?" remarked Hanson. "Just so!—and you say that was close on nine o'clock? Well, you'll have to see if you can trace her between nine o'clock and ten. Try that Cordwainer's Walk district, Turner."

Turner shook his head.

"Why, as you know, sir," he replied, "Cordwainer's Walk is only a sort of by-lane; there's scarcely a house or cottage about it. Still, she must have gone somewhere that way."

"She was probably on her way to meet somebody near the Castle," said Hanson. "Well, go on with it in the morning."

When the sergeant had gone, Hanson, meditating over his information, had an idea. Miss Gilkison probably had gone to meet Marris. Perhaps he had his car waiting for her. But . . . did she meet him?

CHAPTER IV

THE FIRST POINT

Hanson was down at Swarthington by nine o'clock next morning, and, after a short consultation with Skelton at his cottage door, went on to the Crossways Farm, alone. He had already decided on a plan of action as regarded the Marris family. He was not going to interview Marris, his wife, or her mother in the character of suspicious investigator; that, under the present circumstances, would not suit his purpose. If either Marris, or Mrs. Marris, or Sabina Clay had had a hand in the murder of Miss Gilkison, there was plenty of time to trace the crime to one or other, or to all; they would not run away. Quiet inquiry, patient putting-together of one slight thing and another, was the line to take, thought Hanson, especially in respect to people like the Marris lot, who, as all country-folk are, would be reticent to the last degree about affairs of their own.

The house to which Hanson drove on leaving Skelton was a large, old-fashioned farmstead, ivy-clad as to its walls, and rambling as to its architecture, which stood at a point where the road from Norlanstead crossed a wide highway run-

ning north and south. On the other side of the broad space of the intersection of these roads stood the principal inn of the village, the Ploughboy, once a famous coaching house; the long range of stables on its side, now little used, served to remind lovers of the past of the days in which stage-coaches and post-chaises were for ever rolling and hurrying along the road. And at the door of the Ploughboy, smoking a morning pipe, stood its landlord, who, as the superintendent pulled up his car, waved his hand to him, and then came across the broad highway.

"Morning, Mr. Hanson!" he said. "Fine morning, sir." Then, coming close to the side of the car and leaning over it with a significant glance at its occupant, he asked: "Anything definite been heard about this murder affair?"

"Not a great deal," replied Hanson. He, too, glanced at the landlord, an ex-policeman, who, on leaving the force, had become licensee of the Ploughboy. "Why, Sanders—do you know anything?"

"I can tell you something," answered Sanders. He looked, meaningly, at the front of Marris's house. "Going to call there, Mr. Hanson?" he asked.

"Just for a minute or two, to make an inquiry," said Hanson.

"You'll find 'em at breakfast," observed Sanders. "Latish riser, is Mr. Marris. Well, if you'll

step across to see me after you've been there I'll tell you of a little matter or two I know of. Go there first—or Marris'll be off round his farm."

He strolled back across the road, and Hanson, leaving his car at the gate of the Crossways, approached the side door of the house and knocked. A man's voice from inside bade him enter, and lifting the latch Hanson obeyed the invitation on the instant and walked straight in.

The first thought that shot through Hanson's police-trained mind was that if these people or any one of them were guilty, they, or he, or she, were the coolest customers on the face of the earth. The door through which he had passed admitted directly into a big, raftered house-place, half-kitchen, half-parlour; it was easy enough to see that roomy as the house itself was this was the usual haunt of Marris and his family. And he and they were all there. Marris, a big, good-looking man, but dour and somewhat sinister of expression, sat at a round table before the fire, eating eggs and bacon; his wife, a handsome strapping girl, of a slightly sullen and defiant look, stood by the fire, a toasting-fork in her hand. And at a long table, on the far side of the kitchen, engaged in preparing some dish, doubtless intended for the mid-day dinner, stood a tall, dark-faced, black-eyed woman whom the police-superintendent instinctively set down as Sabina Clay.

Marris, in the act of transferring a mouthful of food to his lips, turned as the door opened and stared at his visitor with cool and almost insolent assurance: the two women glanced at him unconcernedly, as if it were (as it probably was) the most ordinary thing in the world for visitors to drop in with total absence of formality. And before Hanson could speak, Marris had put his food into his mouth; his wife had transfixed a slice of bread and was applying it to the glowing fire; and the elder woman, after one swift glance at the entrant, had resumed her task. And Hanson spoke—first.

"Good morning, Mr. Marris," he said, "sorry to intrude on you in such unceremonious fashion!"

"What do you want?" growled Marris.

Hanson went nearer to the table, looking from one to another of the three.

"Just to ask a question or two," he answered. "You're all aware, of course, of the murder of your neighbour, Miss Gilkison, at the Castle, night before last?"

"No business of ours!" snapped Marris. He helped himself to more bacon from the dish before him and snatched at a fresh round of hot toast. "What d'you come here for?"

"To ask a polite question or two," retorted Hanson. "We are trying, of course, to get information about Miss Gilkison's movements on the night in question. I understood that you and Mrs.

Marris and Mrs. Clay were all in town till late last night, and I should like to know if any of you saw Miss Gilkison, and if so, at what time and where?"

Again he looked from one to the other, and, his glance resting last on young Mrs. Marris, she spoke, with a significant flash of her handsome eyes.

"I've never seen Miss Gilkison for many a week!" she answered spitefully. "I've something better to do than to look at a thing like that!"

"Aye, to be sure!" exclaimed the elder woman. "And same here! I've never seen her for I don't know when, nor met her, neither! And a good job for her, too! If I had met her, she might ha' had her brazen face spoiled a bit, and——"

Marris smote his hand heavily on the table.

"Hold your tongues!" he shouted. "What call ha' you to speak! Look you here, Mr. Superintendent of Police!" he went on, turning angrily on Hanson. "If you want questions answering, you know how to get 'em answered—in a witness-box! And if you think you're going to come spying and prying into my house——"

But Hanson had already turned on his heel.

"Good-morning, Mr. Marris!" he said. "That, perhaps, will be a better course!"

He closed the door softly behind him, and going back to his car, took it across to the Ploughboy. He was somewhat puzzled at the results of his interview. Were these people speaking the truth, or

was it merely defiance? Somehow, he was inclined to believe they knew nothing of the dead woman's movements on the night of the murder. In that case he must turn his attention elsewhere. Still, as Marris had sneeringly suggested, there was the witness-box. . . .

Sanders was waiting for him in the yard of the inn, and presently led him into the house and to a quiet parlour. He gave Hanson a shrewd look as he pulled forward a chair for his visitor.

"You'd get nothing out of 'em, across there, Mr. Superintendent!" he said, with a knowing smile. "What?"

"Nothing but insolence," replied Hanson.

"Aye! that's what I expected," remarked Sanders. "Marris just now, for some reason or other, is like a bear with a sore head; he can't stand speaking to. And his young wife has had her temper spoiled, and as for the mother-in-law, she's a bad lot! So there you are!"

"What did you want to tell me, Sanders?" asked Hanson.

"Well—this. You'll have heard, no doubt—I know Skelton went off to see you last night—what's said, and known, here in the village about Marris and this Miss Gilkison? Of course, it isn't mere rumour—it's fact! Marris has been running after her for some time—ever since she came here."

"So I understand. Well?"

"Well, there's no doubt Mrs. Marris has been jealous. But I reckon little of that—she's under Marris's thumb. Her jealousy would waste itself in words and tears. But—there's her mother, Sabina Clay. Sabina's the sort that can use words freely—of a sort that could only come from a mouth like hers. But she'd go further than words! She's threatened that woman!"

"Skelton told me of that," said Hanson.

"Very likely," replied Sanders. "But Skelton doesn't know; at least, he only knows what he's been told, what he's picked up. Now I do know—that's what I wanted to tell you. This Sabina Clay is, at times—only at times—a drinking woman. When she has these fits she generally does her drinking at home, after bringing her liquor from Norlanstead. But sometimes she goes to the Woolsack, at the other end of the village. Now, not long since they turned her out of the Woolsack one night, and she came down here and tried to get in. Of course I showed her the door, sharp! I wouldn't have her in here at any time. She kicked up a fine row outside my back door, before a group of men and women. Finally she got on to this Miss Gilkison and declared she'd swing for her in the end! There was more of it—but, there you are!"

"She was drunk!" said Hanson.

Sanders shook his head.

"Drunk, no doubt—I said so," he answered.

"But if you want my opinion, Superintendent, Sabina Clay killed that poor woman! And everybody in the village thinks so!"

"What I want, Sanders, is evidence," said Hanson. "If you can get hold of any here in the village——"

The ex-policeman interrupted his old chief by pointing the stem of his pipe towards the gables and chimneys of the Hall, visible amongst its elm and beeches through the window of the little room in which they were sitting.

"There's a woman across yonder, Superintendent," he said, "who can tell you a lot! Mrs. Tewkesbury, the head-gardener's wife. She's in the know!"

"I've seen her once—yesterday," replied Hanson. "I got very little out of her."

"Maybe!" remarked Sanders, with a smile. "But—you didn't press her! She does know, a lot! She was this Miss Gilkison's pal—thick as thieves they were! See her again, Superintendent!"

"But what is it you think she knows?" asked Hanson.

"She knows about Marris carrying on with Miss Gilkison," said Sanders. "And it's that, Superintendent, that lies at the bottom of this murder! As I say, you see her again! She can tell something—if she's so minded."

Hanson left his car in the yard of the Ploughboy

and walking through the grounds of the Hall went to the head-gardener's house. Mrs. Tewkesbury herself opened the door to him and started on seeing who her visitor was. But she took Hanson into the house and to a private parlour. And Hanson went straight to the point with a keen glance at the evidently nervous woman before him.

"Mrs. Tewkesbury!" he said, "you'll remember that when we talked, yesterday, you said you didn't think there was anything more you could tell me about Miss Gilkison. Now since then I've heard a great deal of what you may call village gossip and rumour, and I think there is more you can tell me. And I wish you would—everything'll have to come out, you know."

"What do you think I could tell you?" asked Mrs. Tewksbury, still nervous.

"It's said that you and Miss Gilkison were very close friends—always together," replied Hanson. "It's also said in the village as being, practically, common knowledge that Miss Gilkison was carrying on with Marris. Now did she take you into her confidence about that?"

Mrs. Tewkesbury fingered the hem of her apron, and looked from one side to the other.

"It's between you and me, you know," said Hanson, reassuringly. "Confidential!"

Then Mrs. Tewkesbury faced him.

"Well," she replied hesitatingly, "I did know that she was always meeting him, and that he used

to visit her at Holly Bank of an evening, and that he took her about in his car, now and then. And I warned her against it, over and over again—warned her solemnly! I told her no good would would come of it. But—my warnings were no good!''

''Look here, Mrs. Tewkesbury!'' said Hanson. ''In a case like this, you and I can speak plainly to each other. Was she a light woman?''

''I don't think so,'' answered Mrs. Tewkesbury. ''But she was a very vain woman, fond of admiration, and in my opinion, Marris made a dead set at her—he's a reputation, or had, for running after pretty women. I warned Miss Gilkison over and over again about playing with fire. You see, Mr. Hanson,'' she went on, with a sudden burst of confidence, ''I feared that woman Sabina Clay! I know what she is, and she began to threaten Miss Gilkison!''

''Do you suspect Sabina Clay?'' asked Hanson.

Before Mrs. Tewkesbury could answer this direct question a knock came at the front door. Excusing herself, she went to answer it; a moment later she came back to the room followed by a tall, good-looking, gentleman-like young man whom Hanson recognized as having seen in company recently with Sir John Hezlerigge, the Squire of Swarthington.

''Mr. Kennaway, Mr. Hanson,'' murmured Mrs. Tewkesbury.

The new-comer bowed politely to the superintendent.

"Sir John's compliments, Mr. Hanson, and he will be greatly obliged if you will step over to see him."

CHAPTER V

THE OLD HAND

Hanson rose from his chair with alacrity on receiving this summons. He knew Sir John Hezlerigge by repute as a once-famous Judge of the High Court, who, at the age of seventy, had recently retired from the bench to spend the remaining years of his life as a country gentleman, at Swarthington Hall, which he had purchased on his retirement. He also knew him by sight—a fine-looking, keen-faced, bright-eyed old man, who had a fancy for clothes of a sporting cut, and loved a good horse and a smart fox-terrier and, when he rode out on one, or walked abroad with the other as companion, made a figure at which it was good to look. And Hanson knew more—Sir John, in his time, had been one of the most famous advocates practising in criminal cases; later, he had made himself notorious as one of the firmest of judges; the wrongdoer for whom there was something to be pleaded in extenuation got mercy at his hands; the criminal whose deed or record was black got none.

"Very pleased indeed to wait on Sir John," he said, following Kennaway from the house. Then,

glancing inquisitively at his guide as they walked across the lawns and gardens towards the Hall he observed, "I think I've seen you, sir, in company with Sir John—in Norlanstead, once or twice?"

"I am Sir John's secretary," replied Kennaway.

"Just so!" remarked Hanson. "I suppose Sir John wishes to see me in regard to this murder. A nasty business, Mr. Kennaway."

"Yes," replied the secretary in a somewhat cold, non-committal fashion. "As, I suppose, all murders are!"

"This was a particularly brutal one," said Hanson. "You'd know the poor woman, of course, as she lived close by?"

"I have spoken to her now and then—I rarely go into the village," answered Kennaway. "I am pretty fully occupied—Sir John is writing his reminiscences."

"Jolly fine reading they'll make, too, sir!" exclaimed Hanson, with enthusiasm. "I must buy that book as soon as it's out. Reminiscences?—Sir John must have no end of 'em!"

Kennaway made no reply—he struck Hanson as either a very stand-offish or a naturally taciturn young man. They were at a side door of the Hall by that time, and Kennaway took his companion straight along a corridor and into a handsomely furnished study at a desk in which, placed against a wood fire, the old lawyer, keen-eyed as ever, sat

writing. He sprang up as the superintendent entered and waved him to a chair near his own.

"Good morning, Mr. Hanson!" he said cheerily. "Hope I'm not taking you from your duties?—but, hearing you were about, I thought I'd like to have a few words with you about this very sad affair—the poor woman being a near neighbour of mine."

"Very much obliged to you, Sir John, I'm sure—greatly honoured," said Hanson.

He took the offered chair, and, glancing round, saw that Kennaway had left the room and closed the door behind him. "Yes," he proceeded, "it is, as you say, Sir John, a very sad affair—I was just saying to your secretary that this is a particularly brutal murder—the work of a fiend!"

"I know little about it except what I learnt in a short talk with the village policeman here," remarked Sir John. "Perhaps you may be inclined to tell me more—I daresay you're aware," he added, with a smile, "that I have had some experience in criminal matters, and if I can give you any advice——"

"I'm very well aware of your reputation, Sir John!" said Hanson, smiling back. "Who isn't? Well, it's like this——"

He gave the old lawyer a clear, epitomized account of all that he himself had seen and learnt from the moment of his summons to the Castle Grounds until that in which they were talking. Sir

John, standing with his back to the fire, listened in silence, watching him with close attention, and he remained silent for a moment after Hanson had finished. And when he spoke, his first words made the superintendent start with surprise.

"A length of green rope! Green! Odd! Describe it!"

"I never saw anything like it before, Sir John!" replied Hanson. "It's not a bell pull—one of the old-fashioned sort—or anything like that. It's a strong, hempen rope, the thickness of an ordinary clothes-line, and brightish green in colour. It had obviously been cut from a longer piece."

"Have you done anything to trace its ownership, or source, so far?"

"So far, no, Sir John—of set purpose. Nobody but the doctor, Police-Sergeant Turner, Roberts, the Castle caretaker—those who were actually present at the discovery and removal of the body—know about the peculiar character of the rope. I pledged them all to absolute secrecy about it, for reasons of my own. You see, Sir John, the inquest will be opened at Norlanstead this afternoon, at two o'clock—I've already arranged with the Coroner that it shall be a merely formal opening, with a modicum of absolutely necessary evidence and identification, and so on, and that he shall then adjourn for, say, a fortnight. As soon as that's done I propose to get to work actively, especially as to the ownership of that piece of rope, the peculiar

nature of which I shall make public, and before the adjourned inquest comes on, I shall hope to make an arrest."

"Those bank-notes, too? You will trace those?"

"That will be an easier matter, Sir John. We have the numbers. But I can't think this was a case of murder for the sake of robbery. There was money left in the woman's hand-bag, and valuable jewellery on her person. Besides, after drawing that £125 from the bank she went to Selsborough —probably she spent or paid away the £100 there."

Sir John nodded.

"Well," he said, "this Marris affair? Was it just a—shall we say, flirtation?—or a vulgar intrigue? I didn't know the woman—I have been too much engaged since coming here to make the acquaintance of the village people. But my secretary, Mr. Kennaway, knew her. He tells me—she was on some parish committee with him—that she was quite a nice woman, of a superior sort. Still——"

"I don't think there's any doubt, Sir John, that however nice, or superior, or anything else she may have been, she carried on some sort of a—I don't know what word to use—an affair, we'll say, with this man Marris. And there's no doubt, either, that Marris's mother-in-law, Sabina Clay, has threatened her life because of it. Those are—facts!"

"Well," said Sir John, "can you trace that peculiar piece of rope to Sabina Clay? If so—eh?"

"I shall do my best to trace it to somebody, Sir John! But it appears to me that there has been a lot of devilish cunning and ingenuity about this murder, and it may not be the simple thing that it would turn out to be if Sabina Clay, or young Mrs. Marris, or both in collusion, were guilty. There's a mystery about it that, in my opinion, goes deeper than a mere case of revenge!"

"Do you know anything of the antecedents of the woman?" asked Sir John.

"No more than I told you, Sir John, in my brief account—that, according to your head-gardener's wife, who was a close friend of hers, she had been a lady's maid and that a late mistress had left her very comfortably off."

"There's a point there, Mr. Hanson," observed Sir John, after a moment's reflection. "You should find out if anyone benefits by this woman's death. If she was pretty well off——"

Before he could say more, the door opened, and an elderly butler appeared, obviously anxious to speak to his master, who, signing him to come forward, received a whispered communication from him, at the end of which Sir John turned to the superintendent.

"A rather fortunate coincidence, Mr. Hanson!" he said. "The dead woman's brother is outside in

search of you. I suggest we should have him in, eh? Bring him in, Jarvis."

The butler retired, and almost instantly appeared again, ushering in a middle-aged, highly respectable-looking man, obviously of the gentleman's-servant class, who was dressed in mourning and wore an air of deep concern. He made a deep bow to Sir John, and looked inquiringly at his companion.

"Come forward, Mr. Gilkison!" said Sir John. "Take a chair, pray—and allow me to say how very sorry I am for you. You have come over to see the Superintendent of Police?—here he is, Mr. Hanson. Mr. Hanson and I were just discussing this very grievous matter."

Gilkison, with another bow, took the chair to which Sir John pointed and shook his head dismally.

"I am deeply obliged to you, sir, for your kind words," he said. "I feel this very keenly indeed, sir. I was not aware that my poor sister had an enemy in the world!—she was a kind-natured, warm-hearted woman, and—but I will say no more of that, sir. I came as quickly as I could to see Mr. Hanson, and learning in Norlanstead that he had gone to Swarthington, I followed him—hence this intrusion, sir."

"No intrusion, Mr. Gilkison, no intrusion!" said Sir John. "Very sorry indeed for you. But

now—Mr. Hanson and I were just discussing a matter in relation to your sister which you may be able to enlighten him on. What were your sister's actual financial circumstances, and does anyone benefit by her death?"

"Because," added Hanson, "it's said here, Mr. Gilkison, that your sister was a wealthy woman, and——"

Gilkison smiled sadly, and smoothed the mourning band round his silk hat. He shook his head deprecatingly.

"No, Mr. Hanson," he said, "no, Sir John! My sister was not a wealthy woman—that is, as far as capital is concerned. She was a fortunate woman. My sister, gentlemen, had been until some eighteen months ago in the employ, for many years, of a mistress who became, I may say, remarkably fond of her, and at her death left her a cash legacy of £1,000 and an annuity for life of £500. I imagine that my sister spent a good part of the legacy in fitting up and furnishing the house, Holly Bank, which she took in this village; the annuity, of course, died with her."

Hanson gave Sir John an expressive look, and rose to his feet.

"Then nobody benefits by her death—to any extent, at any rate," he said. "I shall have to be going, Sir John, with many thanks to you for your interest and help. Mr. Gilkison, you'd better come

with me—I shall want you at the inquest this afternoon."

"A moment before you go," said Sir John. "Mr. Gilkison—Mr. Hanson has been giving me a pretty full account of all that he knows in connection with this sad affair, and it has just struck me that you, perhaps, can throw some light on one puzzling matter which, if cleared up, might be helpful in solving the mystery of your sister's death. You knew your sister very well, of course?"

"We were very friendly indeed, Sir John, and on affectionate terms," answered Gilkison, "but we had not spent much time together of late years, as she was in one part of England and I in another."

"Well, do you know who the friend was whom she was in the habit of addressing in her letters as Mousie?" inquired Sir John. "Presumably, a woman friend."

"Just so!" murmured Hanson. "If I only knew that!"

But Gilkison shook his head, and his face showed his inability to answer.

"No, sir!" he replied. "No, Sir John! I don't! She had several woman friends."

Sir John nodded and turned to his desk.

"Well!" he said. "Perhaps that can be ascertained. That unfinished letter, Mr. Hanson, strikes

me as being of the highest importance. You must find out the identity of Mousie. I am greatly interested—good-bye, good-bye!''

Hanson took the dead woman's brother away with him, and drove him back in his car to Norlanstead. He was busied from his return until two o'clock that afternoon in settling with the Coroner and other officials the exact procedure at the opening of the inquest, which, as he had said to Sir John Hezlerigge, he wished, for his own purposes, to make as brief as possible. He did this to such effect that the folk who crowded the Coroner's Court at two o'clock, hoping to hear a multiplicity of detail, were out of it by a quarter-past, having heard nothing but the merest necessary evidence of the finding of the body, its identification, medical testimony as to the cause of death, and the Coroner's decision to adjourn all further proceedings for a fortnight.

But as soon as Hanson left the Coroner's Court, he hastened to his own office, and took with him half-a-dozen pressmen who had come to Norlanstead in the hope of getting some sensational copy. At Hanson's office they got it—but not in the shape they expected. Hanson, indeed, turned every man of them into an instrument for extracting information from the public. In every evening paper of the district there appeared that night, with a request that they should be copied in

every London and provincial paper next morning, three questions in big type:

1. Can anybody give any information as to the length of rope, brightish green in colour, and of clothes-line make, with which Miss Gilkison was strangled?
2. Can anybody give any information as to B. of E. notes (Numbers So and So to So and So) which Miss Gilkison drew from the Norlanstead Old Bank on the day of her death?
3. Will the friend of Miss Gilkison whom she called "Mousie" come forward?

Hanson went to bed that night confident that within twenty-four hours he would get some information as a result of this press publicity. He had not to wait twelve; before he was up next morning there came a knock at his bedroom door and an intimation that Mr. Chilsworth, of the Market Street Emporium, was waiting to see him.

CHAPTER VI

TRAIL OF THE ROPE

Hanson knew Chilsworth as the proprietor of a general store in the town—a sort of nondescript establishment in which all sorts of stuff could be had at popular prices, from cheap and showy furniture to children's toys. He knew Chilsworth, too, as a fussy, self-important, talkative little man, go-ahead in business and shrewd in his dealings; he was the sort of man, too, who would not come to him at eight o'clock in the morning unless he had something of importance to say. And Hanson made haste with his dressing and hurried down to his dining-room, to find Chilsworth warming his back at the fire and evidently full of his subject, whatever it might be. But Chilsworth wasted no time in letting Hanson know what the subject was.

"Morning, Mr. Hanson," he began, before the superintendent could speak. "About this length of green clothes-line, now, Mr. Hanson? Seems to me that must have come out of my shop!"

Hanson closed the door upon himself and his caller.

"Clothes-line, eh?" he said. "Yes—it may be clothes-line. I only thought of it as thin rope—green rope."

"Have you got it?" inquired Chilsworth.

Hanson had got it. For purposes of his own he had brought away the length of green rope from the police-station the night before, and had locked it up with Miss Gilkison's hand-bag and its contents. He now took it from a safe in the corner of the room and silently handed it to his visitor.

"Oh, that's it!" exclaimed Chilsworth. "God bless my soul!—to think that one's handling what a murderer's handled! But that's it, Mr. Hanson —no more doubt of it than that my name's James Chilsworth. This length, Mr. Hanson, has been cut from the end of a green clothes-line that, as sure as I'm a living man, was sold, not so long ago, from my place of business, the Market Street Emporium!"

"As a clothes-line?" asked Hanson.

"As a clothes-line, sir! It is a clothes-line!—what else? I'll tell you! As you know, I deal in all sorts of things; we can fit you up, sir, at my place with almost anything you want in the furnishing and hardware line, from an elegant suite of complete drawing-room furniture at fifty guineas to a paper of pins at a penny three farthings. And, of course, clothes-lines come into what we'll term the domestic requirement line—people who wash their clothes must have clothes-lines on which to hang 'em out to the wind and the sun, Mr. Hanson. Well, some little time ago, I bought a job lot of new clothes-lines—they were sent to me from

some wholesale place. I noticed 'em when my people unpacked 'em because they were coloured, which is unusual. There were half-a-dozen yellow, half-a-dozen red, half-a-dozen red and yellow, mixed, half-a-dozen red and white, and half-a-dozen bright green. This has been cut from one of the green ones. That, sir, I will take my oath of!"

"Have you any of the green ones left?" asked Hanson.

"Not one, sir! All gone! As are most of the others."

"And, of course, you don't know to whom the green ones were sold? If you did——"

"Ah, but that's where I think I can help!" exclaimed Chilsworth. "When I saw the question about this green rope in the papers last night—I saw it too late to come round, for I'd been out of town all the evening and didn't get home till near eleven o'clock—when I saw it, I began to bethink me about those green clothes-lines. Now I sold two of 'em myself, over the counter, to two ladies in the town, and I can tell you who they were. One was Miss Barraclough, of Number 5, Waverley Terrace—you know her, elderly maiden lady who takes in lodgers. The other was Mrs. Grading, Laburnum Cottage, near the Castle—she takes in lodgers too; at least, she's one, that Mr. Bassett that's been living in the town this last year or two. As I say, I sold those myself, and to these ladies."

"The other four?—what about them?" inquired Hanson.

"Ah, there you have me! I can't say—definitely. When I get to the shop this morning, I'll make inquiries of my assistants and see if they can jog their memories. But, unfortunately, the man who'd be most likely to know, my late manager, young Robson, left me three weeks since to try his fortune in Canada—he wants to get into one of those big hardware and agricultural implement stores that they have in the Western Provinces."

Hanson thought matters over for a moment.

"We shall have to trace every one of those green clothes-lines, Chilsworth," he said. "If you'll quietly ask your remaining assistants if they can remember who got the other four, I shall be obliged to you. I'll come round and see you at your place during the morning."

Chilsworth bustled off, and Hanson, after another speculative look at it, put the length of green clothes-line back in his safe, and presently sat down to his breakfast. He had no doubt whatever that the little tradesman had opened out a highly important field of inquiry. And it was not an impossibly wide field! There were six clothes-lines. They could be traced—they must be traced. And if one was discovered from which a certain length had been cut—why, then, he would be a good many steps nearer to the solution of the

problem as to the murder of the late Miss Gilkison.

He went round to the police-station after breakfast, hopeful of some news about the other questions printed in big type in the newspapers. On his way he encountered the manager of the bank from which Miss Gilkison had drawn the bank-notes; the manager gave him a significant look as they exchanged greetings.

"I see you're on the track of those notes, Hanson," he said. "Of course, ultimately, you ought to have no difficulty about that. They're bound to be presented at the Bank of England."

"Just so," replied Hanson, "but my notion is that if they're being passed from hand to hand, at present, I can get news sooner. The thing is—what did she do with them, if she did anything with them? Or were they taken from her bag by the murderer?"

"Has it struck you that she may have sent them away, there and then, by registered post?" asked the manager. "Why not make an inquiry at the Post-Office?"

Hanson thought that a good notion, and he called in at the Post-Office as soon as he reached the town. But he drew that covert blank—Miss Gilkison had sent no registered letter away from there on that, her last, afternoon. Nor had any news arrived at the police-station as to the notes or as to the identity of Mousie. And after a little conversation with those of his subordinates who

were still prosecuting inquiries in the town, he went round to the Market Street Emporium.

Chilsworth beckoned Hanson into his private office as the superintendent entered and, once in there, picked up a piece of paper from his desk.

"Well, I've done better than I expected, Mr. Hanson!" he said, with a highly gratified air. "We're getting on, sir, we're getting on! I've traced five of the sales of that green clothes-line, five, Mr. Hanson. Here they are, written down on this memorandum form. I'll read 'em over. Miss Barraclough, 5, Waverley Terrace. Mrs. Grading, Laburnum Cottage. Mrs. Stuart-Wilkinson, the Vicarage. Mrs. Thorpe, Parkdale Lodge. The Misses Tindall, Acacia Villa. There you are, sir—take the papers. But the sixth—can't trace the sale of that, no how! Robson must have sold it. And, as I say, he left me three weeks ago for Canada."

Hanson put the list of names in his pocket.

"Pity we couldn't trace the sixth!" he muttered. "There's no doubt that piece was cut from one or other of the six."

"No doubt at all, sir, no doubt at all!" agreed Chilsworth. "And I'll tell you what I'll do, Mr. Hanson! I'm a public-spirited man, I am, sir, and anxious for the honour and reputation of this old town of ours, and I feel it a disgrace that this foul crime should have been committed within its ancient walls, and equally anxious that condign pun-

ishment should be meted out to the villain who committed it, and to show my spirit, sir, I'll cable just now to Robson, and prepay a reply—and damn the expense!"

"You know his address, then?" asked Hanson.

"I know where he was going to, first, and I should say he's just about got there. That's Lethbridge, Alberta. There's a big store there of the sort I mentioned that he wants to get into. A cablegram to Post-Office, Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada'll find him, Mr. Hanson—that's where I'm addressing his letters, anyhow. And, sir, I'll send that cablegram, and prepay a reply, and, in accordance with the principles upon which this business is conducted, I'll do it now!"

He snatched up a cablegram form from a stand of stationery on the desk, and while Hanson looked on, half-amused at his enthusiasm, began to pencil a message:

"Walter Robson, Post-Office, Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada. If you remember sale of green clothes-line to anyone cable name of purchaser at once to Chilsworth, Norlanstead."

"There, sir!" said the Emporium's proprietor, waving the form triumphantly. "That goes at once, reply prepaid. And within twenty-four hours——"

"Yes, but you needn't saddle yourself with the

expense, Chilsworth,'' said Hanson. ''Let it come out of the police——''

''No, sir! my job, this!'' interrupted Chilsworth with determination. ''It is my bit in the work of justice, sir! Glad to have been of use—hope to be of more use when I get the reply from Robson. And in the meantime, Mr. Hanson, I suppose you'll just inquire at the names and addresses I've given you?''

Hanson replied that he was going to do that there and then, himself, and while Chilsworth hurried off to the Post-Office he began a round of calls on the various ladies named on the memorandum form. At each of the first four houses at which he called he not only heard of possession of a green clothes-line but had it exhibited to him; in each case it was intact. But at the fifth, that of Mrs. Grading, who lived in a queer, old-fashioned house, Laburnum Cottage, near the Castle, he was quickened by a suspicious intimation and his ears instinctively pricked.

''Why, it is perfectly true, Mr. Hanson, that I had such a clothes-line,'' said Mrs. Grading, in answer to his confidential question. ''I bought it at Chilsworth's Market Street Emporium some little time ago, and thought it a very odd thing that a clothes-line should be coloured. But I haven't got it now!—it was stolen out of my yard, at the back of the house, two or three days ago. Last Tuesday night, as far as I'm aware.''

"You're sure of that, Mrs. Grading?" asked Hanson.

"Why, of course, I'm positive!" replied Mrs. Grading. "Now I come to think of it, it was Tuesday night. It was there on Tuesday evening; on Wednesday morning it was gone. Somebody had come into the yard and taken it off the hooks." She paused and looked significantly at her caller. "Mr. Hanson," she went on, "I've read the papers this morning, and I was coming up to see you! Do you think it possible that the piece of cord with which that poor woman was murdered was cut off my line?"

"It looks uncommonly like it!" said Hanson. "Just let me have a look at your yard."

Mrs. Grading led him from her front parlour into a back room and through its French window into a large paved yard, the outer wall of which bordered on a lane lying between her house and the Castle Grounds. She pointed to two upright posts which fitted into sockets sunk in the pavement.

"That clothes-line was fixed on those posts, Mr. Hanson," she said. "It was just the right length—that's why I bought it; Mr. Chilsworth measured it for me. And it was stolen from there on the night I spoke of—last Tuesday night."

"Tuesday was market-day," said Hanson, meaningly. "Miss Gilkison was murdered late last night. Um!" He glanced at the Castle, rising

beyond the wall of the yard. "Very easy thing for anybody to get over your wall into this yard, Mrs. Grading, isn't it? And that the lane between you and the Castle is usually very quiet, I believe?"

"Used by very few people," said Mrs. Grading. "It leads to nowhere."

Hanson turned from looking at the Castle to throw a glance at the adjoining houses. "You don't suspect any of your neighbours of stealing the line, Mrs. Grading?" he asked, with a half-smile. "Couldn't use it if they got it, could they?"

"Oh, come now, Mr. Hanson!" laughed Mrs. Grading. "You know well enough that we're all highly respectable people about here!"

Hanson laughed, too, and made for the house with the remark that he wished he could trace the thief. Passing back through the French window he came face to face with Mrs. Grading's lodger, a man named Bassett, who had come to live in Norlanstead a year or two before, a quiet, unassuming, elderly individual who appeared to belong to the category of gentlemen-with-a-little-money, and who, as he stood there, brushing his coat preparatory to his morning walk, gave the superintendent a polite old-fashioned greeting.

"Mr. Bassett knows about the line," remarked Mrs. Grading. "It was Mr. Bassett advised me to go up to the police-station and tell you."

Bassett, a tall, eminently gentlemanly-looking

man, of the retired-actor sort, looked knowingly at the superintendent.

"I daresay—now that he has been here—that Mr. Hanson has drawn certain conclusions," he said. "To me—a mere amateur—the facts are—shall we say obvious!"

Hanson made no reply beyond a laugh that might be taken as acquiescent. But once outside the house he realized the fact that the problem was now more difficult than ever. For if the length of green rope with which Miss Gilkison had been done to death was part of that stolen from Mrs. Grading's yard, the difficulties of solution were increased by the fact that neither he, nor Mrs. Grading, nor anyone could possibly have any clue to the identity of the thief!—who, of course, would already have taken good care to destroy the remaining portions of the stolen clothes-line.

Ruminating on this new fact, Hanson went slowly back to the police-station. And as he turned into the Market-Place he was suddenly aware that a little way in front of him a man of foreign appearance was walking, who wore a blue serge suit of nautical cut and carried gold rings in his ears.

CHAPTER VII

THE MAN IN BLUE SERGE

Hanson noted this man at first as a stranger whose appearance was decidedly foreign; it was not until he had followed him a few yards further that his memory awoke, and it flashed across him that this must be the man of whom the caretaker at the Castle had spoken as having been seen wandering across the grounds on the afternoon preceding the murder. He quickened his steps, intending to accost and question him; before he could reach him, the man turned into the open door of the police-station, and when Hanson followed him inside he was already speaking to a policeman in the corridor. The policeman turned to his superior.

"Wants to see you, sir," he said, indicating the stranger. "Head of police he's asking for. Foreigner, I think, sir."

The man caught some of this and glanced quickly at Hanson.

"Head of police—yes," he said. "Speak with him a little—private."

"I'm the Superintendent of Police here," replied Hanson. "Come this way. Send Wilson into

my room," he added, turning to the policeman. "Tell him to come at once."

Then he led the caller into his private office, gave him a chair, and as soon as the sergeant he had sent for appeared, nodded to his visitor to proceed. The man pulled out a newspaper and pointed to a line of bold type.

"About this murder in your town," he said. "I read all about it in this newspaper yesterday where I am staying, and I think I shall come to see you about it. Because I think I know something—something to tell."

"Much obliged to you, I'm sure," replied Hanson. He had already made a keen inspection of the man, and had set him down as an honest fellow. "What is your name, if you please?"

"Name? John Larsen."

"And what are you?"

"Sailor. First mate."

"Where are you from, at present, Mr. Larsen?"

"Kingsport. My ship is there—the *Alstead*, of Stavanger."

"You're a Norwegian, then?"

"Norwegian, yes."

"Well, what can you tell us, Mr. Larsen?"

"I think I know something may be of use. From what I read there in the paper I think it. It is there—my ship is laid up in dry dock at Kingsport, so I have some time on my hands. Well, I think of an old sea-mate of mine, an Englishman,

who used to live in this town—Martin his name. Kingsport it is not far from to this town, so I come. Last Tuesday morning that is. I seek for Martin at the address I had—he is gone away. Then I look about the town—the old places. I like it, and so much the old inn where I get my dinner that I say I will spend the evening and night here. So I ask them for a room at that old inn——"

"A moment, Mr. Larsen. What inn was that?"

Larsen pointed through the window towards the Castle, seen in the distance.

"Down there, near the Castle—beneath it. The —the—a name strange to me."

"That would be the Cordwainer's Arms, sir," remarked Wilson, who was taking a shorthand note. "They do take travellers in."

Larsen's face brightened.

"Yes, yes, that is it—Cordwainer's Arms!" he agreed. "I get my room there—very nice. I enjoy myself there—nice people—I have what you call a good time. And after my supper, I am standing at the door, smoking my cigar and looking up at the towers of the Castle above me when, all of a sudden, I see the woman who was murdered!"

The two police officials exchanged a glance. Before either could speak, Larsen spoke again, nodding his head with great solemnity.

"Oh, yes, indeed—I saw . . . her!"

"How do you know you saw her?" asked Hanson.

Larsen waved the paper.

"Here is a description of what she is like, that poor woman!" he answered. "Very well, as soon as I read it I declare to myself. 'Yes! that is the woman I see that night as I stand at the door of my inn in that old town! The woman!' "

"Well—where was she when you saw her?" inquired Hanson.

"Coming down the narrow street that leads from the corner of the inn to the railway station," replied Larsen. "I know not its name."

"Cordwainer's Alley," muttered Wilson.

"What time was that?" asked Hanson.

"I sit down to my supper in the inn parlour at a quarter after eight," answered Larsen. "It would be, when I stand at the door and see the poor woman, at just about nine o'clock. Perhaps a few minutes after nine."

Hanson glanced at certain memoranda pencilled in his pocket-book. Miss Gilkison, he saw from one, left the Selsborough train at Friarsgate Station at 8.57, and was seen by the clerk who collected the tickets to go down the steps into Cordwainer's Alley. And from the foot of those steps to the Cordwainer's Arms was about two minutes' walk—yes, Larsen's story fitted in, admirably.

"Well," he said, putting his note-book away, "what did she do, Mr. Larsen? You watched her, evidently?"

"Oh, yes, I see her quite well in the lamplight—

there are two, three, perhaps four lamps around there. I watch her, yes—a fine figure of a woman, tall, and walked very gracefully. What did she do, yes? Well, she turned the corner of this narrow street she had come down, the right corner, where a road goes up to the town. She stand there for just one minute—no, one second, as if looking for somebody. Then she catch sight of a man that is standing a little way up that road, and she goes forward, quick, to him. And——"

"Half a minute, Mr. Larsen!" said Hanson. "This is getting to a critical point! Let us be very particular. Now, had you seen this man before she came?"

"Yes, I had just noticed him—not much, you know. But—yes, seen him."

"Tell what you saw!"

"Well, he came down the road from the town—the road that is at the foot of that side of the Castle. When he reach to about twenty or thirty yards of that corner I tell you of, he stops. That is just before she came. And as I tell you, immediately she sees him, she goes to him—quick!"

"Well, what then?" asked Hanson.

"They stand and talk for just one minute. Then they cross the road and they go up that path through the trees on the side of the Castle, and I see them no more. I say to myself, it is a lovers' meeting, and I go into my inn."

"Can you describe the man?"

"He is a large man—a big man. I see that. But his face—no, no! I never saw it. He is twenty, thirty yards away, and I do not see him in the light. Only his—his size. Big. Bigger than myself."

"I take you to be five foot ten," observed Hanson.

"Well, he is bigger than that. I say, a big fellow."

"Can you say anything about his dress—his clothes?"

"No, nothing in particular. I think—just like anybody else. Overcoat—dark. That is my impression. You see, he is twenty, thirty yards away! A —just a figure."

Hanson suddenly got an idea.

"Are you in any hurry, Mr. Larsen?" he asked. "Do you want to get back to Kingsport, to your ship?"

"Me, no? I am in no hurry. My ship, she will be, oh, many days yet in dry dock. No— I think, perhaps, I shall stay at the old inn once more, tonight—very nice there!"

"Well," said Hanson, looking at his watch, "come home and have some lunch with me, Mr. Larsen, and after lunch I'll take you in my car to have a look at a certain man—in secret."

For Hanson already had an idea—the man Miss Gilkison met was Marris. He and she went into the Castle Grounds; they were followed by Marris's wife, or by Sabina Clay, *or* these women,

knowing Marris and Miss Gilkison were in the habit of meeting there on market-nights, were already lying in wait for them. Marris, a little later, left Miss Gilkison to fetch his car; there was a road on the other side of the Castle by which he could bring it to a point near the scene of the murder; when he had gone, the mother and daughter, or Sabina Clay alone, had done their work. It was nothing but an idea—yet there might be something in it!

"The man won't know you, nor what you're after," he added, "and you may be able to recognize something about him—his build, his walk, something. What do you say?"

"Oh, I come with you—great pleasure!" said Larsen. "She is a very graceful woman—poor thing! I like to help you catch that murderer; better still, I like to shoot him!"

"We hang 'em in this country!" observed Hanson, with a grim smile. "And we'll catch and hang this murderer yet—or—" he added to himself, "more likely, murderess!"

He took Larsen home and did the honours of his table generously, and towards the middle of the afternoon put his guest into his car and drove off to Swarthington. And there, having put the car in the yard of the Ploughboy, he enlisted Sanders's services.

"Look here, Sanders!" he said, after introducing his companion as a possibly most important

witness. "How can we give this gentleman a sight of Mr. Geoffrey Marris, without attracting attention?"

Sanders smiled his ready comprehension.

"I can manage that for you, easy enough, sir," he said. "I was just going out in my trap when you came—bit of business up the village. Now, I happen to owe Marris a small account for hay and horse-corn; I'll pull up my trap at his front gate, and he'll come out to see me: I know he's at home, for I saw him go into his house not so long ago. Come into the house, sir, and I'll put you where you can overlook Marris's gate unobserved."

He led the two men into the inn and upstairs to a bedroom window overhung with lace curtains, and pointed out how, standing behind the curtains, they could overlook the front of Marris's farmhouse. Then he left them, and a few minutes later they saw him drive out of the inn yard in his pony-trap and crossing the intersection of the roads, pull up at Marris's front gate and signal with his whip to one of the windows.

"Now watch the man who comes out of that house!" said Hanson. "Look at him closely! See if he reminds you in any way of the man you saw that night!"

A moment later, Marris came out of his front door, and, hands thrust in the pockets of his riding-breeches, lounged slowly down the garden path to the side of the landlord's trap. There,

while Sanders pulled out his money, he stood in full view of the watchers.

"Now—look at him—look well!" exclaimed Hanson.

But Larsen had already looked and was shaking his head.

"No!" he said. "No—not at all! That is not the fellow! That is a—a wide man—great shoulders—broad. No!"

"But you said the man you saw was a big fellow!" suggested Hanson. "Big!"

"Yes, big—but," Larsen paused, and began to gesticulate. "Big—large—high-up there! What you call—eh?"

"Tall!" exclaimed Hanson. "Tall! And not—wide, eh?"

"No, no—the other way—I don't think of the word!"

"Slender? Is that it? Tall—slender?"

"Taller than me—not so wide across this way," explained Larsen.

Hanson turned away from the window. The test had failed.

"A tall, slender man," he muttered. "Um—far off as ever, now!"

"Nice figure of a man," said Larsen. "That man out there—oh, much wider!"

Hanson waited a few minutes until Sanders had driven off into the village, and then he took his companion back to the car and set out on the

return journey to Norlanstead. He was disappointed at the failure of his little scheme: it would have simplified matters greatly if Larsen had recognized Marris as being similar in general build to the man whose meeting with Miss Gilkison he had witnessed. And he was wondering how to get on the track of this man when the Norwegian suddenly clutched his arm and let out a sharp cry.

"There! There!—that is the sort of man I saw!" he exclaimed. "Him! There!"

Hanson looked quickly round. They were passing the gates of the Hall; just inside them talking to the lodge-keeper stood Kennaway.

"That sort of man!" repeated Larsen. "Tall—slender—nice figure! Just like that!"

Hanson drove on. Notions were crowding on him. But—they must have time.

"I see!" he said quietly. "A man like that—tall, slender. Just so!"

He made arrangements with Larsen about keeping in touch before letting him go, and after calling at the police-station in quest of news and hearing of none, went home and gave himself up to thinking things out anew. He had made little progress when his dinner-time came round, but before he was through that solitary meal his maid announced Mr. Leonard Twistleton, whom Hanson knew to be a registered money-lender, having offices in Norlanstead and in one or two adjacent small towns. And Twistleton, closeted with Han-

son, went straight to the business that had brought him there.

"Mr. Superintendent!" he said in a low voice. "You're advertising for information about certain bank-notes, of which you hold the specified numbers? Very well! I have those notes! The lot!"

"You?" exclaimed Hanson. "Good Heavens! —and where did you get them?—and when?"

Twistleton leaned nearer and dropped his voice to a whisper.

"I got them last Wednesday morning—day before yesterday," he said, "and from Sir John Hezlerigge's secretary, young Kennaway!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE BANK-NOTES

Hanson, who was a good trencherman, and liked to dally over the last stages of his meals, suddenly lost all interest in his dinner. After staring a second or two at his visitor, in sheer astonishment, he rose from the table, rang the bell, and bade his maid to clear away the dinner things.

"Wait a moment," he muttered to Twistleton. "We'll have this to ourselves. Here!—have a drink."

He fetched a decanter, a syphon of mineral water, a glass from the sideboard and set them at his caller's elbow; he opened a box of cigars and silently offered it: he kept silence until the maid had gone away and closed the door and he himself had lighted a cigar and dropped into an easy chair. Then he spoke, prefacing his speech with a dry laugh.

"That's a facer, Twistleton!" he said. "I never expected that! Certainly, I got a vague, far-off notion this afternoon that Kennaway might know something, but——" He paused awhile, shaking his head. "Bless me! So you got those notes from him?—the very morning after the murder?"

Twistleton lifted his glass.

"Best respects, Superintendent!" he said. "Yes! But—that's in his favour, isn't it?"

"How do you mean—in his favour?" asked Hanson.

"Acquits him of any guilt, doesn't it?" explained the money-lender. "Do you think any man of commonsense—and he's an educated man!—would be such a fool as to pay away, in the same form, next morning, notes that he'd taken from a woman he'd murdered the night before? I don't!"

"Some men don't think ahead," remarked Hanson.

"I think this chap would!" retorted Twistleton. "He's a quiet, cool sort. A very self-possessed young fellow."

"Still—there's the fact!" said Hanson.

"There's the fact! Kennaway handed over to me at nine o'clock last Wednesday morning the hundred pounds' worth of Bank of England notes which Miss Gilkison drew from the Old Bank the previous day."

"At your office?"

"No—at my private house."

"You're going to tell me the circumstances, of course?"

"Yes! It's what I came for. In the usual run of events, I never divulge any transactions between my clients and myself. But this is unusual, and I'll tell you all about it. Kennaway came to me

three months ago and told me that he had been engaged as secretary to Sir John Hezlerigge at Swarthington Hall. He wanted to borrow some money for three months, to rig himself out in clothes, linen, and so on, as befitted his new position—he was perfectly candid about things——"

"A moment!" interrupted Hanson. "Did you know him at all before he came to you?"

"Just slightly," replied Twistleton. "Not as a client. Until he got this job at Sir John Hezlerigge's, he was an assistant master at Mr. Whittaker's private school at Wiltington, where my two boys are. I'd seen him there now and then, and thought him a superior young fellow. Well, as I say, he was quite frank about what he wanted. He said his outfit needed seeing to; he'd never been able to save anything—and so on. He also told me—and gave me proof—that he'd a legacy of five hundred pounds coming to him from a deceased uncle; he expected to get it within the three months. So I said I was willing to oblige him—and as a matter of fact I handed him ninety pounds on his signing a three months' bill for one hundred. The bill fell due this week, and, as I say, he turned up on Wednesday morning and paid the hundred pounds."

"With those notes?"

"With those notes!"

"Of course, he wouldn't say where he got them?"

"No!—why should he? There was nothing said. He handed me the notes, and I handed him his bill. Stop, though! I did make a sort of joking remark to him about his expected legacy—said I hoped he'd got it, or something. He merely replied it was all right. Of course, I concluded he'd received it."

Hanson mixed himself a drink and sipped it thoughtfully for a moment or two before making any further remark.

"What do you make of this, Twistleton?" he said at last. "You'll have formed some opinion?"

The money-lender flicked the long ash from his cigar and regarded the glowing end as if seeking inspiration from it.

"Nobody knows the truth about the bank-notes but Kennaway himself," he said slowly. "What one wants to know, of course, is where and how and when he got them. Did he get them from that woman? Or did he get them from somebody we don't know of to whom she'd given them? Not much time for that, was there? I've been reading up, this evening, before coming here, all that I could find in the papers, and I gather that this woman, after calling at the Old Bank on Tuesday and drawing that money, left by the early afternoon train for Selsborough and didn't come back to Norlanstead till nine o'clock that night. Those are her movements! What about Kennaway's?"

"I'll tell you something!" exclaimed Hanson.

He went on to tell the money-lender all about Larsen and his story and of Larsen's remark about Kennaway's similarity to the man seen in Miss Gilkison's company near the Cordwainer's Arms. "What do you make of that?" he asked.

"That the man this Norwegian chap saw was Kennaway!" replied Twistleton. "I should say there's no doubt about it! So that was at nine o'clock? And—according to the doctors, she was murdered——"

"About ten," said Hanson. "There's an hour to account for."

"Well, of course, after this, you'll see Kennaway?" suggested Twistleton. "And you'll have it out with him? But—nothing'll make me believe that he murdered that woman! Because, you know, he wasn't desperate about the money. When I lent it to him, I told him that if it wasn't convenient to meet the bill on maturity, it could be renewed."

"You did?"

"I did—on the same terms. I didn't look at this as an ordinary transaction—I thought he was a decent young fellow who'd got a job that would suit him better than schoolmastering and I wanted to do him a good turn. Still—I thought it well that he should pay for the accommodation. But I'd have renewed, if he hadn't been ready. And—he knew it. So—why should he murder this woman for the sake of a hundred pounds that he wasn't really pressed for?"

"It's not that," said Hanson. "At least, it's not that, yet. I'm not saying it mayn't be—if you'd seen as much of this sort of thing as I have, you'd never be surprised at anything. What I want to know now is—how did Kennaway come into possession of those notes?"

"Oh, well, I've my own idea as to that!" declared the money-lender. "Miss Gilkison lent him a hundred pounds with which to pay me!"

But Hanson shook his head.

"No!" he said. "That won't do, Twistleton! The question about those notes has been before the public, widespread, since late yesterday afternoon—it's in every paper in England, I should think. Kennaway must have seen it, of course. Why hasn't he come forward to explain?"

"I don't see that," objected the money-lender. "You advertised about certain notes, the numbers of which are given. I don't suppose Kennaway even looked at the numbers of the notes he handed me! How many people ever do? So—how should he connect the notes he gave me with the notes drawn by Miss Gilkison?"

Hanson shook his head and laughed.

"Now, I've got you!" he exclaimed. "You said just now that your idea is that Miss Gilkison lent Kennaway those notes. Why, then, of course, on seeing the papers, he'd know that the notes we want to trace *are* those notes! Yet—he hasn't come forward to say so. Why?"

"Better go and ask him!" replied Twistleton.

Hanson threw away his cigar, glanced at the clock, and rose.

"Precisely what I'm going to do—just now," he said. "My car's outside. You'd better come with me."

Hanson led the way to his garden and got the car ready.

"What I shall do when we get down to Swarthington," he said, as they drove off, "is—see Sir John Hezlerigge first."

Twistleton made a murmur of dissent.

"Wouldn't it be best to see Kennaway himself first?" he suggested. "If he can give a proper explanation, why trouble his employer about it? Pity to prejudice Sir John against him!"

"I don't think it would," said Hanson. "I've seen Sir John once already in regard to this affair and in my opinion he's not the sort of man to allow himself to be prejudiced against anybody, by anything. And if Kennaway's entirely innocent how can prejudice arise? Besides, before ever seeing Kennaway I wanted to find out from Sir John, or from his butler, or somebody who knows if Kennaway was away from the Hall that night."

"Well, you know best," answered Twistleton. "I don't want to do the young fellow any harm. Because I'm sure there's an explanation."

"Let's hope so!" said Hanson. "Same time, you know, Twistleton, you can't get away from

the fact that there's some strange connection between what you've told me and the murder! What it may be, Heaven only knows—but it's there!"

Turning his car into the drive at Swarthington Hall, Hanson left it near the lodge and took his companion on foot across the lawns to the front entrance. The butler chanced to be near when Hanson gave his name to a footman, and as the result of a whispered colloquy with him the two callers were at once taken to a small room opening off the library, where, a few minutes later, Sir John Hezlerigge came to them. He nodded affably to Hanson, bowed to Twistleton, whom, Hanson fancied, he took for a detective, and closing the door and motioning his visitors to be seated, turned to the superintendent with a half-whispered question.

"News?"

"I have some news, Sir John," replied Hanson, "and on the surface of it, it's not over pleasant. However, as it concerns, or may concern you, indirectly, I came straight to you with it. You're aware, Sir John, that Miss Gilkison drew a certain amount of money in Bank of England notes from the Old Bank at Norlanstead on Tuesday noon—£125 as a matter of fact. I found £22 15*s.* o*d.* in her bag; the other £100—in notes—was missing. We've been inquiring about those notes, of which we had the numbers. Well, Sir John, the truth is that on Wednesday morning, at nine o'clock,

those very notes were handed, in payment of money owing, to this gentleman, Mr. Twistleton, by your secretary, Mr. Kennaway!"

Sir John's lips parted; his hands went up as if in protest: it was easy to see that the news came to him as a painful shock.

"You don't mean to say so!" he exclaimed in a hushed voice. "Kennaway! There is no mistake?"

"No mistake, Sir John," replied Hanson. He turned to Twistleton. "Tell Sir John all about it, as you told me," he said. "Let him know all the facts."

The old lawyer turned to Twistleton with almost painful expectancy and listened with absorbed attention while the money-lender told his story. He neither spoke nor moved till it was finished, but at the end he shook his head.

"Most extraordinary!" he said. "I cannot think Kennaway—indeed, I scarcely like even to conceive the bare possibility——"

He paused, shaking his head again, and Hanson took advantage of the pause to put in a question.

"Can you tell me, Sir John, where Kennaway was on the evening and night of Tuesday?" he asked. "Was he here?"

"No!" replied Sir John. "That is what is troubling me! He was not. He asked me for leave of absence on Tuesday afternoon until next morn-

ing, and of course I granted it. He left here about five o'clock on Tuesday afternoon and returned about half-past ten on Wednesday morning. Of course, I don't know where he went."

"I have information which leads me to believe that he was seen with Miss Gilkison near the Castle at nine o'clock on Tuesday evening," said Hanson. "It is not positive information, but it's nearly so."

"That," observed Sir John, "would be about an hour before the poor woman is believed to have met her death?"

"Exactly, Sir John," agreed Hanson. He waited for the old man to make some suggestion. None coming, he went on: "Of course, I shall have to see Mr. Kennaway. If there's some explanation——"

"He must have some explanation!" said Sir John. "The facts are—disturbing, but I can't believe—no, no! I have formed quite a good opinion of Kennaway, and I had excellent references with him. Still, this must be cleared up—it can't be allowed to remain where it is!"

Then he rose, and, ringing the bell, bade the footman who answered it to ask Mr. Kennaway to come to him. And having given this message, he became silent, and standing with his back to the fire, remained staring at a point in the opposite wall, his fine features immovable as those of a statue.

CHAPTER IX

THE RECEIPTED BILL

The secretary came into the room so quietly that he was there, and waiting to be addressed, before Sir John realized his presence. The old lawyer came out of his abstraction to find him looking at the money-lender with a gathering frown of disapproval. And he hastened to speak.

"Kennaway!" he said. "Superintendent Hanson wishes to ask you a question—I'm sure you'll readily answer it!—in respect to those bank-notes which you handed to Mr. Twistleton the other day—Wednesday morning, I think?"

"A very simple question, Mr. Kennaway," added Hanson. "Where did you get them?"

Kennaway's face flushed a little, and the frown accentuated. He was still looking at Twistleton, and when he spoke, his tone was decidedly unfriendly.

"I understood that my transaction with you was a strictly confidential one, Mr. Twistleton!" he said, icily. "You gave me to understand——"

Twistleton shrugged his shoulders and spread his hands.

"Why, so it was, and so it would have remained,

Mr. Kennaway!" he answered, apologetically. "But circumstances alter cases, and in this case I couldn't help myself! When it's a matter of murder——"

"What has my transaction with you got to do with murder?" demanded Kennaway. "I owed you money, and I paid you, and——"

"Just a moment, Mr. Kennaway!" interrupted Hanson. "Don't let's get at cross-purposes! Come, now!—you must have seen the papers since last night—local and London, too. You must have noticed that I'm advertising for information about a hundred pounds' worth of Bank of England notes, the numbers of which are specified, which Miss Gilkison drew from the Old Bank on Tuesday noon. Is that so—have you seen it?"

"I have seen that, yes!" replied Kennaway.

"Very well! Those notes," continued Hanson, watching him closely, "are the notes you handed to Mr. Twistleton on Wednesday morning."

"No!" exclaimed Kennaway, promptly. "That I'm sure they are not! You're mistaken—utterly mistaken!"

Sir John made a little sound of gratification. But Hanson turned quietly to the money-lender.

"You've got the notes on you, I believe, Twistleton, haven't you?" he said. "Let's have a look at them!"

Twistleton produced a pocket-book from his overcoat and drew out an envelope, from which

he took a thin wad of bank-notes secured by a rubber band: Hanson at the same time sought for and found a slip of paper which he laid on the table.

"Here's the memorandum given to one of my men by the bank," he said. "It gives the numbers of the notes issued to Miss Gilkison. If you, Sir John, and you, Mr. Kennaway, will compare that memorandum with the notes which Mr. Twistleton now produces, you'll see that there's no doubt about the matter! Those notes, handed by you, Mr. Kennaway, to Mr. Twistleton, at nine o'clock last Wednesday morning, are the very identical notes paid by the bank cashier to Miss Gilkison on the previous day! That's—fact!"

Sir John bent over the table, examined the memorandum and the notes, and, drawing himself erect, sighed gently. He appeared to be about to ask a question, but Kennaway anticipated him. He had scarcely glanced at the memorandum; instead he put a finger on the notes, now spread out on the table.

"Are you certain, Mr. Twistleton, that these are the notes I gave you on Wednesday morning?" he demanded. "Certain?"

Twistleton stared his surprise.

"Good Heavens!—why, of course I'm certain!" he exclaimed. "Can't you see for yourself that they are?"

"How can I see for myself that they are?" retorted Kennaway. "One bank-note is just like another bank-note to me!—I've not seen so many of them in my time as all that! I see that those are bank-notes, but I can't say they're the same bank-notes."

"Look here, young man!" broke in Twistleton, a little irascibly. "I'm not used to having my word questioned in business matters! Those are the bank-notes you gave me—brand-new Bank of England notes, the numbers running consecutively. I placed them in this pocket-book, with that india-rubber ring round 'em, in your presence, and there they've remained until this evening when I took them out to compare the numbers with those given in the newspapers. It's not a scrap of use your contradicting——"

"I don't think Mr. Kennaway meant to contradict you, Mr. Twistleton," broke in Sir John, soothingly. "He merely raised the question—are those the notes?"

"They are the notes!" affirmed Twistleton, sharply. "The very notes!"

"Mr. Kennaway has nothing to do but to tell me where he got them," said Hanson. "That's —simple!"

"I think you should say, Kennaway," suggested Sir John. "Mr. Hanson, of course, is bound to trace these notes from the time Miss Gilkison got

them at the bank to the moment they came into Mr. Twistleton's hands. It can do you no harm to give an explanation——"

But Kennaway still showed signs of obstinacy.

"I don't admit that those are the notes I handed to Mr. Twistleton on Wednesday morning!" he said. "I don't think they are! Mr. Twistleton handles a great deal of money—he has no doubt handled scores, dozens of bank-notes since Wednesday——"

"Wrong, my lad!" muttered Twistleton. "As a matter of sure fact, I've never touched one since you put these into my hand!"

"Well, I can't believe those are the notes I gave you," retorted Kennaway. "I say there is some mistake!"

"Will you tell us, then, where you got the notes which you admit giving to Mr. Twistleton?" asked Hanson. "Surely that isn't an unreasonable thing to ask, under the circumstances!"

"I would rather not," replied Kennaway. "It is no business of anybody's."

"Kennaway!" said Sir John, solemnly. "I advise you to tell!"

"I prefer not to tell, sir! It is my business," answered the secretary, becoming more and more dogged in manner. "And the more I think of it, the more I'm convinced that there's a mistake somewhere. The bank people may have made a mistake—even if Mr. Twistleton hasn't."

Hanson signed to Twistleton to put the notes away; he himself restored the bank memorandum to his pocket.

"Very well, Mr. Kennaway!" he said. "Then you oblige me to ask you certain other questions. You can please yourself about answering them. But I may as well tell you that I'm perfectly convinced that the notes you handed to Mr. Twistleton are those which Miss Gilkison drew from her bank! So I'll put a plain question to you—did you get those notes from Miss Gilkison?"

"That's ridiculous!" exclaimed Kennaway, impatiently. "Of course I did not!"

"Mr. Twistleton," said Hanson, "has been considerate enough to suggest that you got them from Miss Gilkison as a loan. That, of course, would have explained matters satisfactorily. But as you deny that, I'll have to ask you another question. Did you meet Miss Gilkison in Norlanstead on Tuesday night?"

He looked hard at Kennaway as he put this question, and he knew at once that the surprise with which the secretary received it was genuine.

"I?" he exclaimed. "Meet Miss Gilkison in Norlanstead on Tuesday night? What on earth do you mean?"

"What I say!" retorted Hanson. "I have information which leads me to believe that you met Miss Gilkison near the Castle on Tuesday night, at nine o'clock."

Kennaway laughed, sneeringly.

"Have you?" he said. "Well, at nine o'clock on Tuesday night I was not within twelve miles of Norlanstead!"

"You can prove that?" asked Hanson.

"To the full—if need be."

"I'm glad to hear it! And, I suppose, that you weren't in Norlanstead at all that night?"

"I can prove, if need be, that I left Norlanstead at five o'clock on Tuesday afternoon and was never near it again until a quarter to nine next morning," replied Kennaway. "And I can account for every minute of the intervening time, too!—if strict necessity arises."

"Good!" said Hanson. "And, I suppose, you can account for the notes which (whether they were those now in Mr. Twistleton's possession or not) you handed to Mr. Twistleton? You can—if need arises—prove where you got them?"

"Certainly, I can! If absolute necessity arises!"

Hanson smiled. He glanced knowingly at Sir John Hezlerigge.

"What would you call absolute necessity, Mr. Kennaway? Would you speak—I mean, would you divulge these things, where you were Tuesday night, where you got the notes with which you paid Mr. Twistleton—if, for instance, I told you that I was about to arrest you?"

"I don't think so," replied Kennaway. "I think

you would get into trouble if you arrested me. You have no grounds for such a course, and——"

"I'm the best judge of that!" interrupted Hanson. "Come, now—be wise! Tell us, in confidence, where you were on Tuesday night and from whom you got those notes! Because, look here!—it's all very well your talking about mistakes, and so on, but there's no mistake! The notes you gave to Twistleton are the notes Miss Gilkison got from her bank! That's flat! I say again, be wise, and say where you got them!"

"No!" said Kennaway. "No!"

"Kennaway," urged Sir John, more gravely than before, "let me ask you to think again!" Then he added, with a glance at Hanson, "If you won't give Mr. Hanson this information, will you give it to me—in private?"

But Kennaway shook his head.

"No, sir—at present, no. I can't. Some day—soon, perhaps."

Hanson rose to his feet.

"Let me have a word with you—in another room—Sir John, if you please," he said. "This is the situation, Sir John," he continued, when he had followed his host into the library. "I've no doubt whatever, now, if I ever had, that Kennaway is utterly and entirely innocent of any complicity in Miss Gilkison's murder. But those *are* the notes she drew from the bank, and he had them! If he won't tell me where he got them, how

am I to go further in tracing them? A word from him, and matters would be simplified! He got them from somebody, between Tuesday afternoon and Wednesday morning. Who?"

"The whole thing is very distressing," said Sir John. "I have every confidence in Kennaway! He came to me with excellent references and testimonials, and he has served me very faithfully. At the same time, I have been, now and then, a little uneasy about him. I think he has some secret, occasionally he is very abstracted—becomes absent-minded, you know. Once in a while, he asks for a sudden leave of absence—of course, I don't know where he goes!"

"Where he went on Tuesday night, most likely, Sir John!" replied Hanson. "And wherever that may be, it's where he got those notes! You see, it all comes back to that!—he had those notes!"

Sir John nodded and remained silent for a few moments, thinking.

"I don't know, Superintendent, if you have gone into this matter quite deeply enough," he said at last. "I'm sure you won't mind my suggesting that? Now, just let us go back a little. Miss Gilkison, I understand, drew £125 in banknotes from the Old Bank at Norlanstead on Tuesday, about one o'clock—a little before the bank closed for the day. Of that money you found, I believe, £22 odd in her hand-bag; the £100 had dis-

appeared. Well, now, I think we may conclude that Miss Gilkison drew that money for some specific purpose. Can't you think of some purpose?"

"I'm not good at imagining things, Sir John," replied Hanson. "Not my line!"

"Well, now, I think it needs very little imagination to form the opinion that Miss Gilkison drew that money wherewith to pay some account or other," said Sir John. "Have you made inquiries in the town as to whether she did use the money for that purpose?"

"No, Sir John! But I know that Miss Gilkison wasn't in the town on Tuesday afternoon. She went to Selsborough very soon after leaving the bank, and she didn't return from Selsborough till nine o'clock in the evening."

"Well, there you are! Selsborough—a big town! She may have paid the money away there. Have you examined her papers for a receipt, or anything of that sort? I think you told me that you have the hand-bag she carried?"

"I have the hand-bag, certainly—there are papers in it. I can't say that I've examined every paper. There were letters—I examined those closely."

"Well, go home, and look at every paper—every scrap of paper! I will be responsible for Kennaway—he won't run away. I shall not be surprised if you find my surmise to be correct.

She paid that money away in Selsborough!"

"That doesn't explain how it got into Kennaway's hands," said Hanson.

But he followed the old lawyer's advice, and summoning Twistleton, drove home, and taking Twistleton in with him, got the dead woman's hand-bag out of his safe, and proceeded to examine every paper in it. And he had not been engaged in this task many minutes when he came across a stamped receipt which showed that on the previous Tuesday afternoon Miss Gilkison had paid one hundred pounds to Messrs. Witherspoons & Co., of Selsborough, furniture dealers and upholsterers.

CHAPTER X

NECESSARY—BUT USELESS!

Hanson passed over the receipt to Twistleton, who had quietly watched him examining the various papers.

"Sir John was right, you see!" he exclaimed. "That's what she did with those notes! Paid 'em to these people, Witherspoons, of Selsborough! So—that's a point settled."

Twistleton looked at the receipt and threw it back.

"You're no further, Hanson," he remarked. "Or, rather, this doesn't explain Kennaway's possession of the notes. Granted that Miss Gilkison did pay them away to Witherspoons on Tuesday afternoon, how did they come to be in Kennaway's hands on Wednesday morning?"

"That's got to be looked into," said Hanson. "I shall have to see Witherspoons. Look here!—can you go with me to Selsborough first thing in the morning?"

"I can! As a matter of fact, I was going—I've business there."

"Meet me at Friarsgate Station, then, at nine

o'clock. And—bring the notes with you. We'll find out, somehow, how they got out of Witherspoons's hands into Kennaway's!"

"Nine o'clock, Friarsgate," acquiesced Twistleton. "I'll be there!"

Hanson, however, was at Friarsgate at a quarter before nine next morning. He had got an idea while shaving and dressing—that was the reason of his reaching the station fifteen minutes before the fixed time. And as soon as he got there he went into the booking-office and got the clerk aside.

"Were you on duty here last Tuesday afternoon?" he asked, in tones that insinuated confidential—and official—communication.

"I was, Mr. Hanson," replied the clerk. "I was on duty from one-thirty in the afternoon until ten o'clock in the evening."

"Very well," continued Hanson. "I want to know something. Are you acquainted with Mr. Kennaway, of Swarthington?"

"Sir John Hezlerigge's secretary? Yes—know him well enough! He's often here on Sir John's business."

"Did you see him here last Tuesday afternoon?"

"Yes! He came here. He went off from here on the five o'clock."

"Where?"

"Stokesfield. He goes there, sometimes. Goes

one day and returns the next. He booked to Stokesfield last Tuesday afternoon, by the five o'clock, and came back from Stokesfield next morning by the train that gets here eight-forty."

"Was he alone?" asked Hanson.

"As far as I'm aware—yes. He only got one ticket, anyway—a return."

"Well, keep all that to yourself," said Hanson, and went out to the platform, where he met Twistleton. "I've solved one thing," he remarked presently. "Kennaway was out of town last Tuesday night. And he wasn't at Selsborough. He was at Stokesfield!"

"Stokesfield is only twelve miles from Selsborough," observed the money-lender, after he had heard an account of Hanson's conversation with the booking-clerk. "He could easily run into Selsborough from Stokesfield in the evening. What's the use of getting away from the real point—Kennaway got hold of those notes!"

"I hope all this is going to be of some use!" grumbled Hanson. "If it isn't, I'm wasting my time!"

"It's a thing that's just got to go through," said Twistleton. "You can't help tracing those notes! If you didn't, I should. I'm not going to have it said that I'm in possession of notes which——"

"Oh, well!" interrupted Hanson. "I suppose Witherspoons can explain the whole thing! The

notes must have been paid to them! And there wasn't the time for them to get into circulation again. They'll know something about them!"

"Bad business people, if they don't," said Twistleton. "I keep a register of every Bank of England note that passes through my hands."

Witherspoons, duly reached an hour later, proved to be an eminently business-like looking establishment—a large, first-class furnishing and upholstering concern. And the manager, with whom Hanson and Twistleton were soon closeted, was an equally business-like looking man, who, when the police-superintendent's identity had been disclosed to him, listened with absorbed attention to his story, and at its close nodded his head as if he understood, at any rate, some of it.

"Yes!" he said. "That's quite right, Superintendent, as regards certain facts. Miss Gilkison was a customer of ours—we partly furnished and decorated her house, Holly Bank, at Swarthington. There was a balance of exactly £100 on her account, and she did call here, and paid it, last Tuesday afternoon—I saw her myself, pay it, in notes, to a clerk. The thing now is—what became of those particular notes?"

"I suppose you can trace them?" suggested Hanson.

The manager smiled enigmatically.

"This is a very considerable business, Super-

intendent," he said. "We have a very large daily turnover: a hundred pounds' worth of bank-notes wouldn't make any noticeable figure in it, you know! Now let me think a moment—yes, Miss Gilkison called here about, or just before, three o'clock. At half-past three our cashier would make up her list of moneys to be paid in, and would go round to our bank—it's only two doors away!—in the ordinary course. Miss Gilkison's notes would go with the rest of the money. Very well—we'll have the cashier here—she's an eminently practical and business-like lady!—she'll enlighten us."

The cashier, a smart, middle-aged woman, presented herself within a few minutes, and eyed the two callers as if with a strong and ready-made suspicion as to the nature of their business.

"Miss Mackenzie!" said the manager. "This is an affair relating to last Tuesday afternoon. Do you remember Jones' bringing you an account that had just been paid to him by a Miss Gilkison of Swarthington?"

"Yes," replied Miss Mackenzie, promptly. "£100."

"What was it paid by?—cheque, or what?"

"Bank of England notes."

"I suppose they went to the bank, a bit later, with the rest of the day's cash?" suggested the manager.

"Well, no, those particular notes did not!"

replied Miss Mackenzie. "Their equivalent did, of course!"

"I don't understand!" said the manager.

"Quite simple!" declared Miss Mackenzie. "Just after three o'clock, Miss Stevens, of the upholstery department, came to my office and asked me if I could give her Bank of England notes for a hundred pounds' worth of Treasury notes. She said—though that, of course, was private to me—that the hundred pounds was part of her savings which she was going to use for a special purpose, and as all that in Treasury notes was somewhat bulky, she wanted Bank of England notes. The notes which Miss Gilkison had paid were lying handy, so I counted Miss Stevens's Treasury notes and gave her in exchange the notes that had been Miss Gilkison's. No harm in that transaction, I hope?"

"Oh, none!" said the manager, smiling. "Thank you, Miss Mackenzie—just keep that to yourself, will you? Well?" he continued, turning to Hanson, when the cashier had gone. "Is that any help?"

"Who is Miss Stevens?" asked Hanson.

"A young lady who occupies a very good position in our upholstery department," replied the manager. "Specialist in silk and velvet fabrics, and gets a very good salary—very nice girl, too, she is. Would you like to see her?"

"I should very much like to know what she did with those bank-notes!" said Hanson, dryly. "If she'll only tell——"

"Well, I'll send for her," said the manager. "You can ask her. But that, of course, is her private concern."

Miss Stevens came in a few moments later—a pretty, intelligent, self-possessed young woman, obviously surprised at being summoned. She took a chair at the manager's invitation and looked questioningly at the strangers.

"Miss Stevens!" said the manager, with a reassuring smile. "These gentlemen are here to make inquiry about some Bank of England notes. I understand from Miss Mackenzie that, last Tuesday afternoon, she gave you a hundred pounds' worth of Bank of England notes in exchange for a similar amount in Treasury notes—your property? That's so, isn't it?"

"Oh yes, quite so!" replied Miss Stevens, readily.

"Brand-new notes that she gave you, weren't they?"

"Yes—they were quite new."

"Well, Miss Stevens, these gentlemen are tracing the history of some notes! Do you mind telling them what you did with the notes you got from Miss Mackenzie?"

Under the questioning gaze of three pairs of

eyes, Miss Stevens flushed crimson. She had been self-possessed enough up to then, but now she showed signs of confusion and distress.

"Oh I would rather not do that, if you please!" she exclaimed. "What—what I did with them is surely my own concern! What can these gentlemen have to do with it?"

"I'm afraid I must press for an answer!" said Hanson. "It can't do you any harm to tell, young lady!"

The girl shook her head and tears came into her eyes. Suddenly, Twistleton tapped Hanson on the shoulder and led him to a corner of the room.

"Look here!" he whispered. "I don't see any use in forcing this girl to speak! What good can it do? You've established the fact that Miss Gilkison got rid of those notes herself, and you know what became of them. Leave it at that! You know now that there's no connection between Kennaway and the murder, so——"

Before Hanson could reply, a knock at the door heralded the entrance of a clerk who advanced to the desk and exchanged a whispered conversation with the manager; the manager rose and came over to the two men.

"Here's Sir John Hezlerigge and Mr. Kennaway outside!" he murmured. "Shall I have them in? Show them in," he went on, as the superintendent nodded. "Miss Stevens—you can run

away, if you like. Sorry if you've been upset, but——"

The girl, who by this time had a handkerchief to her eyes, made for the door, only to come face to face with Sir John Hezlerigge and Kennaway. She looked up, gave a sharp cry—and the next instant Hanson found Kennaway, his face livid with uncontrolled anger, shaking him violently by the collar.

"Damn you!" roared Kennaway. "What do you mean by coming here after my wife?—you damned——"

Hanson shook himself free. He had seen clean through things in a flash, and the vision made him as cool as his assailant was hot. He stepped back, gently pushing Kennaway aside.

"Calm yourself, my lad!" he said. "There's no harm done! I didn't know this young lady was your wife—how should I? I never heard of her existence till just now. But I know how she got those notes, and I conclude she gave 'em to you—and that's all there is about it! If you'd only spoken last night——"

Sir John Hezlerigge drew Kennaway back, and turned to Hanson.

"Well, Superintendent, Mr. Kennaway did speak last night—after you'd gone!" he said. "He took me into his confidence. It seems that he and this very charming young lady have been

secretly married for some months, and up to now they haven't quite seen their way to letting it be known or to living together. They've been a bit troubled about the repayment to Mr. Twistleton, because Mr. Kennaway has not yet got his legacy, and last week Mr. Kennaway insisted that she must find the money for Mr. Twistleton out of her little savings. She found it. What Mr. Kennaway could not possibly understand when you came to see him at my house last night was how the bank-notes which his wife handed to him on Tuesday evening could possibly be those which had belonged to Miss Gilkison. But when he had told me about his wife's employment, I came to the conclusion that Mrs. Kennaway had probably exchanged a cheque of her own for cash at Messrs. Witherspoons—which is the reason why he and I have come over this morning."

"Well, you're about right, Sir John," said Hanson. "That was about it. And, as I say, if Mr. Kennaway had only been straightforward last night, and had told me——"

"We called to see you this morning," interrupted Sir John, "on our way here, but you had already left. I gather you are satisfied as regards Mr. Kennaway?"

"Oh, as regards him, yes!" assented Hanson. "I only wanted to get this bank-note business cleared up!" He made a hasty adieu, and dragged Twistleton out into the street. "It isn't often I

swear, Twistleton!" he said. "But I'm going to now! Damn! An extra strong 'un, too!"

"Well—and why?" asked Twistleton.

"Time wasted, man, time wasted! All come to nothing!"

"It was necessary! You'd got to clear that up."

"Necessary, but useless! I'm no nearer than I was. I thought, once, that I might get a clue through those bank-notes! That's failed. Well—I reckon I'll have to fall back on the green rope!"

"I belong to a very good club here in Selsborough," said Twistleton. "Come round and have a drink—it's close by. Queer profession, yours, Hanson!" he went on, as the superintendent followed him round the next corner and into the entrance of the club. "And a trying one, when you've got several trails before you! But you know, if I were you, before going further, I should sit down and ask myself just one question!"

"And what's that?" inquired Hanson.

"Just this!" replied Twistleton. "*Why* was Miss Gilkison murdered?"

CHAPTER XI

MOTHER GADGETT

Hanson turned on the money-lender with a laugh of amused surprise.

"Good Heavens, man!" he said, as they sat down in a quiet corner of the club smoking-room. "Do you really suppose I haven't been asking that question of myself for the last four days and nights? It's just what I am asking myself all along!"

"Perhaps not in the way I mean," answered Twistleton. He summoned a steward and ordered drinks for his guest and himself. "I mean that there's a why and wherefore for everything in this world. Whoever murdered Miss Gilkison had a motive for doing so. As far as can be seen, the motive wasn't robbery. You tell me her interest in her life-annuity died with her—accordingly she wasn't murdered for what she had to leave. But there was a motive! And to get at it, I reckon you'll have to track back, Hanson!"

"To where?" asked the superintendent.

"God knows! Somewhere in her past life, I should say. What do you know about her? Nothing—at least, nothing much. Now, I'll put some-

thing to you that you mayn't have thought of. Suppose this woman was in possession of some secret? A secret which concerned somebody's safety, liberty? What do you think of that proposition?"

"I have thought of it," replied Hanson. "I found a letter on her desk, at her house, the morning after her death, a letter just begun and left unfinished in which she hinted—as I thought—at a discovery. But it broke off! And I don't know to whom it was to be sent. If I did——"

"Is that the woman—or it might be man—that you're advertising for as Mousie?" asked Twistleton.

"The same! If Mousie would come forward, that point could be cleared up—Mousie, whether he or she, would probably know to whom it was that Miss Gilkison was referring."

"Well!" said Twistleton. "You'll find that I'm not far off being right. This murder sprang out of something that happened in the past. I don't believe any local person has anything to do with it! You've told me a lot about the village gossip respecting that she-devil, Sabina, down there at Swarthington. Well, everybody in the district knows Sabina! She could give points to a Billingsgate fish-porter as regards the use of words—of a certain sort. But—it's all words! Sabina Clay has too much respect for her own neck to wring anybody else's!"

"There's her daughter, Mrs. Marris. Motives there," said Hanson. "Jealousy—revenge—all that!"

"Fudge!" declared Twistleton. "I know young Mrs. Marris! Sullen, sulky young woman—feels herself neglected. But—she wouldn't rise to such tragic heights as murdering her rival! No! you'll have to look back, Hanson."

"I'll have to do something," agreed Hanson. "Can't have a smudge like that on the old town, you know!"

"Why don't you get down one of these Scotland Yard men?" asked the money-lender, with a sly laugh. "One of the regular sleuth-hound lot that can see through a brick wall?"

"No!" said Hanson. "Not unless I'm obliged. I've two or three of my own men on the job now, making all sorts of inquiries. If we're baffled—why, I'll think of that. But I prefer to do my own work." He pulled out his watch and rose. "I must be off," he continued. "Just time to catch a train back. Well—that's the end of one trail!"

"I knew that would come to nothing," said Twistleton. "Still—it was an episode—you'd got to do it. And it clears things!"

"I wish the rest could be cleared as easily!" muttered Hanson. "Well, by-bye!"

He hurried off to the station, and, back at Norlanstead hastened to his office, which he had not had time to visit that morning. On the way he

looked in at the Market Street Emporium. Chilsworth, at sight of him, shook his head.

"No cablegram arrived so far!" he said. "I expected it before now. Perhaps he hasn't got to Lethbridge yet. He'll find my message there, anyhow."

"Well, let me know if you hear anything," said Hanson. "It all helps."

Chilsworth left his counter and followed him to the door.

"Anything materialized?" he asked.

"Nothing of importance," replied Hanson. Then, suddenly remembering that he hadn't seen Chilsworth since their talk about the clothes-lines, he added, "Oh, well, there is one thing that I meant to tell you next time we met—I went the round of the people to whom you sold those clothes-lines. I saw all of them—the clothes-lines, I mean—with the exception of Mrs. Grading's. Now it's an odd thing—a coincidence, perhaps—that Mrs. Grading's green clothes-line was stolen out of her yard the night before the murder—it had been left out there."

Chilsworth pursed his lips together and emitted a sharp whistle.

"Whew-ew-ew! That's no coincidence, Hanson! Stolen out of Mrs. Grading's yard, eh? Why, of course, that's close to the Castle Grounds—not fifty yards from where the murder took place. That looks as if—as if——"

"Well?" said Hanson. "As if—what?"

"As if some of the people round about there had had a finger in the pie," replied Chilsworth. "Egad, sir, it's a queer business! Well—well!"

Hanson left him wondering and went on to the police-station. And to his room, soon after his arrival and when he had cleared up his morning's business, came Turner, a plain-clothes man, note-book in hand.

"I've about finished my inquiries respecting Marris and his wife and his mother-in-law, Superintendent," said Turner. "At least, I haven't been able to get further than a certain point. I've found out a good deal."

"About their movements here in town last Tuesday evening, eh?" suggested Hanson. "Very good—go through it!"

Turner began to consult his note-book.

"Marris himself came into town, alone, in his car, about three o'clock on Tuesday last," he said. "He put up his car, as usual, at Copperthwaite's Garage. He was in and about the market all the rest of the afternoon. He had tea, with one or two other farmers, at the Reindeer Hotel, at six o'clock. He was with other men, drinking and smoking, in the smoking-room of the Reindeer, till eight o'clock; then he and Mr. Wright, the corn-factor, went across to the Crown Hotel. Marris was in the smoking-room of the Crown till half-past nine. He then went to Copper-

thwaite's Garage and got out his car. The attendant there says he drove off towards the lower part of the town."

"By the Castle, eh?" suggested Hanson.

"The lower road goes beneath the Castle—yes," agreed Turner. He looked up from his book. "That's the last I've got about him," he added.

"Was he alone when he got his car out of Copperthwaite's?" inquired Hanson.

"Yes—alone!"

"Well—the women?" said Hanson, after a pause. "What about them?"

"I've got a good deal more about them than about him," replied Turner. "But, as in his case, it comes to a dead end at a certain point. They came into town—at least, this is the first I can hear of them—about half-past four o'clock on Tuesday; they seem to have walked in together. They had tea at Wilkin's, the confectioner's shop, at soon after five. Between half-past five and seven o'clock, when the shops close, they were at various shops—I've a list of them here——"

"Cut that out!" said Hanson. "That's innocent enough. Never mind the shops!"

"Well, soon after seven o'clock they were both at Ramsbottom's. You know what that is, Superintendent—drinking place! There are what they call snugs there—little rooms where two or three people can sit and drink. It's a popular place with the country-women, is Ramsbottom's—they can go

and drink there in quietude and privacy. In addition to having a drink or two there, Sabina Clay bought a bottle of gin at Ramsbottom's, and took it away with her in her market-basket. They left Ramsbottom's about a quarter-past eight, after being there an hour."

Turner paused at that, and looked over his notes for a minute or two before going on with his story.

"That's the very last I've been able to get about young Mrs. Marris," he said. "Can't trace her at all after she went out of Ramsbottom's with her mother. But I've got more about Sabina Clay. She seems to have gone straight from Ramsbottom's to Mother Gadgett's."

"Who's Mother Gadgett?" demanded Hanson.

"She's a woman who keeps a house down in the low part of the town, near the Castle, Superintendent! A house about which, in my opinion, there ought to be some inquiry made," replied Turner. "I can't say that there's anything there that actually comes within the law, but it's a house with a bad reputation—a house where idle women gather to gossip and drink—there's no doubt about that!"

"Does this woman sell drink?" asked Hanson.

"Probably not!—but there's little doubt that women take drink there, and sit drinking after the public-houses are closed," said Turner. "She's cute, this woman, Mother Gadgett, and

she's been clever enough so far to avoid getting into trouble. But some of us have been suspicious about her a long time."

"Well—you say Sabina Clay went there—to this woman's house, after leaving Ramsbottom's?"

"Yes, I've evidence—from a neighbour—that she went into Mother Gadgett's about half-past eight. Young Mrs. Marris wasn't with her. And that's the last I know about Sabina. I can't trace her after that."

"You haven't inquired at Mother Gadgett's?"

"No—I thought it best not. Until I'd seen you, at any rate."

Hanson rose and picked up his hat.

"I'll go down there with you," he said. "I know where Sabina Clay and her daughter were soon after eleven that night—the carrier picked them up just outside the town. But we must have the intervening time cleared up."

Turner led his chief down to the lower end of the town, underneath the outer walls of the old Castle, and into a little suburb of old-fashioned houses which had seen better days. At the door of one of these, in the corner of a forlorn square, Turner knocked, and presently the door was opened a few inches and an elderly woman looked out. Hanson's sharp eyes sized her up—a crafty, sly, plausible woman, watchful, wheedling.

"Mrs. Gadgett?" he asked quickly.

"The same, sir," replied the woman, respectfully. "At your service, sir."

She held the door wide by that time, and Hanson stepped into the passage.

"I'm Superintendent Hanson, Mrs. Gadgett," he said, without ceremony. "I want to ask you a question. I have had information that Sabina Clay, of Swarthington, was here at your house last Tuesday evening. Is that so?"

Mrs. Gadgett's voice became suave and confidential.

"Well, she was, sir—a little time. We are old friends, Sabina and myself. She's had her troubles, Mr. Hanson, poor thing—a many troubles——"

"What time did she leave your house, Mrs. Gadgett?" asked Hanson.

"It would be just upon a quarter-past nine, sir."

"Did she leave you to go home?"

"She left me, sir, to look for her daughter and her son-in-law, and to ride home in his car. But—of course, I don't like to tell tales, Mr. Hanson—but I did hear that poor Sabina, after leaving me, turned into the Black Boy, sir. Troubles she's had, sir, and turns too readily to spirits, Mr. Hanson."

"Where is the Black Boy?" inquired Hanson, who, since his coming to Norlanstead had not had

time to acquaint himself fully with the town. "Near here?"

"Just round the corner it is, sir," replied Mrs. Gadgett. "Quite a respectable——"

But Hanson had uttered a curt good-morning, and was off, followed by Turner.

"I'll have that house and woman watched, Turner," he said. "You see to it! Well, where's this Black Boy?"

Turner took him round a corner, and, revealing an unpretentious inn, conducted him into its bar, where the landlord, recognizing both, immediately beckoned his visitors inside a private room.

"Police business, eh?" he asked with a grin. "What can I do for you, gentlemen?"

"I have just heard that Sabina Clay, of Swarthington, turned in here last Tuesday night," replied Hanson. "Do you remember that?"

"Well enough!" said the landlord. "She did turn in here—and she was just as quickly turned out—politely, of course. I know Sabina! She wasn't drunk, but she soon would have been if I'd served her. And she was quarrelsome. So—out she went, as soon as she got in. As I say—I know her!"

"You don't know anything of her subsequent movements?" inquired Hanson.

"Nothing! Neither know nor care. Went back to Mother Gadgett's, I should think. That's the spot you police want to see to!" said the landlord, with a sneer. "Fine field for you there. This house, sir, is well conducted."

Hanson retreated. Before he and Turner had gone many yards away from the door of the inn a voice from behind hailed them gently.

"Mr. Superintendent!"

Hanson turned sharply and saw a man, who had evidently come out of the Black Boy, following and beckoning, with a sly smile on his face. He paused, waiting until he came up.

"Well?" he asked brusquely. "You want me?"

The man smiled again, and looking round, lowered his voice to a whisper.

"You're seeking information?" he said. "I can give you a bit! Not about Sabina, though. About her daughter—young Mrs. Marris!"

CHAPTER XII

THE CASTLE WALL

Hanson, who had taken an instinctive dislike to the neighbourhood and the people, looked the man over with official keenness.

"Who are you?" he asked sharply.

"I know him," said Turner. "John Beeman! —works at Salter's Tannery."

"Aye, and has done, without break, for five and twenty years!" said Beeman, with a confident laugh. "If you weren't a bit of a new-comer, Mr. Superintendent, you'd know me well enough! And I'm a man of my word, too!"

"Well—what can you tell?" asked Hanson.

Beeman looked round. There was no one near them, but he dropped his voice and his tone indicated a desire for confidence.

"Why, to be sure, I'm not one to make mischief," he answered. "But I know you're gathering information, and I know why, and I know, too, that you've been at Mother Gadgett's yonder —you'd get naught there, I'll bet!—and that you've just come away from the Black Boy—in fact, I was in the Black Boy, and I heard you question the landlord about Sabina. Now I know

nothing about Sabina, leastways not as regards this job, but I do know something about that lass of hers, young Mrs. Marris! And I'll tell you—between ourselves."

"Well?" said Hanson.

"Confidential, then!" continued Beeman. "Well, I've read all there's been to read in the papers about this Castle murder affair, and a queer do it is, Mr. Superintendent, and in my opinion, one that'll tax all your ingenuity to get to the bottom of! But I can tell you this—yon Marris lot at Swarthington has something to do with it! Make no mistake, they have—at least, young Mrs. Marris and her mother have! Now, I'm a Swarthington man, born and bred, and though I've lived here in Norlanstead and worked here for five-and-twenty years, there isn't a week goes by that I don't take a walk over to the old place, so of course I'm in thorough touch with it, and I know all the village gossip—and there's plenty of that about Marris and his wife. You know that he was carrying on with that dead woman, of course?"

"I know what common report is," said Hanson.

"Well, there's no smoke without fire, Mr. Superintendent!" remarked Beeman with a knowing look. "And there's no doubt Marris was, and his young wife's been jealous. And now I'll come to what I know. Last Tuesday night, about nearly nine o'clock, I was going up town, to Market

Street, and I took a short cut across there by the Castle. There's a narrow alley, as Turner there knows well enough, that cuts across just underneath the old walls, and comes out by the Barbican. It's little used, and its badly lighted—there's only one gas-lamp in all the length, and we've poor quality gas here in Norlanstead. Now, I'd got half way through that alley when I met a couple coming along from the other way—from the town, you understand. They passed me close, a young man and a young woman. The young man I didn't and don't know, though I can give a bit of a description of him. The young woman was Marris's wife!"

"You're sure of that?" asked Hanson.

"Aye, as sure as that I see you!" affirmed Beeman. "I met 'em fairly near that one gas-lamp, and I saw her plain enough—Lord bless you! I've known her ever since she was born! Oh yes, it was young Mrs. Marris, right enough!"

"Did she see you, Beeman?" inquired Turner.

"She showed no sign if she did," said Beeman. "They were walking very quick, and close together, arm-in-arm, and whispering. But I tell you, I knew her, and when they'd passed I stepped aside among the trees on the lower side of the alley, and looked after 'em, to see where they went. 'Cause I'd an idea where they'd be going."

"Well, where did they go?" asked Hanson.

"Just where I expected! A bit farther on there's

a low place in the Castle walls, where the masonry's broken down. They climbed over there, and disappeared into the Castle Grounds. Naught surprising in that, Superintendent! Those grounds are supposed to be closed at a certain hour, but there's plenty of young people in the town who know how to get into 'em at any time! And that's what I can tell you!"

"You say this was about nine o'clock?" asked Hanson.

"All about. I heard the Town Hall clock strike nine as I passed the Barbican, at the other end of that alley."

"Well, this young man that Mrs. Marris was with?" asked Hanson. "Can you describe him?"

"I can give you a bit of a notion," replied Beeman. "He was a tallish, sturdily-built young chap, in a dark overcoat, with a white muffler round his neck, and a grey cap, well pulled down. I didn't get a good look at his face; he was bending down, side-wise, talking to her, but I've a strong idea he was a fresh-coloured, clean-shaven young fellow."

"You took them for lovers, I suppose?" suggested Hanson.

"I did!" answered Beeman. "For naught else! But that's not my point—my point is that young Mrs. Marris was in those grounds that night! How long she was there, of course, I can't say."

"And this young man she was with was a stranger to you?" said Hanson.

"I didn't know him, certainly. Might ha' done, you know, if I'd had a proper look at him," replied Beeman. "But I hadn't—I looked more particularly at her. She never looked my way—neither of 'em did."

Hanson spent a minute or two in thinking over this information.

"Well," he said at last. "I'm obliged to you, Beeman. At present you'd better keep all this to yourself. You haven't mentioned it to anyone before?"

"Not a soul!" replied Beeman. "I did think of coming to you—in fact, I should have done, before the inquest is re-opened. You can trust me!—I can keep my tongue quiet as well as anybody!"

Hanson nodded, and turned away, but before he had gone many yards he turned again and called Beeman back.

"You seem a dependable sort of man," he said. "And you live about here, don't you?"

"Round yon corner," replied Beeman. "Close to the tannery where I work."

"Then you know the neighbourhood," continued Hanson. "What sort of reputation has that woman, Mother Gadgett?"

Beeman made a face, expressive of many things.

"Queer lot, Superintendent!" he answered. "Bad reputation, her and her house. I doubt if you could lay your finger on her or it—she's as deep and sly and crafty as ever they make 'em—but both she and the house have a bad name in this quarter of the town. The house is the rendyvoo of a lot o' women whose husbands can't control 'em—they go there and gossip till all hours of the night. That's well known!"

"Do you know if she sells them drink?" asked Hanson.

Beeman laughed knowingly at the question.

"If I, or you, or anybody knew that, Superintendent, you'd soon be able to be on her track!" he replied. "I don't! But there's drink consumed there. I've an idea that these women put their money together, and Mother Gadgett buys drink with it; then, of course, they meet and have a night of it. But there's no law against that, I believe!"

"You don't know anything else?" inquired Hanson.

"No!—she takes care of that!" said Beeman. "But I know what I think! Only—what's the use of saying what you think if you've no proof of it? Best keep your mouth shut!"

He nodded a farewell and went away, and Hanson returned to Turner and made for the upper part of the town.

"There may be something really important in what we've just heard, Turner," he said, as they

walked along. "I wish we could find out who the young fellow is that Beeman saw with Mrs. Marris! You don't recognize him from the description?"

"No, sir!" replied Turner, with emphasis on the negative. "That's a description that would fit scores of young fellows in the town—aye, and more! Dark overcoat, grey cap, white muffler?—why, there's hundreds of young men who wear all three. There's one thing certain, though," he added, suddenly, "you may be sure, sir, that if the young woman's got a lover—and I suppose she's reason, if all's true that's said about Marris's neglect of her—he'll not be a Swarthington lad!"

"Why not?" asked Hanson.

"Too dangerous," said Turner. "Everybody knows everybody there—small place like that. It would come out. I should say this is some young fellow that Mrs. Marris meets when she comes into town. In that case, I can possibly trace him—somebody may know of it."

"Follow it up, anyway," assented Hanson. He paused, looking about him. "Where is that alley that Beeman talked about?" he asked. "How do you get to it from here?"

Turner took him round a corner and through two or three narrow streets at the foot of the Castle until they came to a stone stairway between two houses; climbing this they came out on

a terrace walk beneath the Castle walls. There Turner stopped.

"I think we ought to make a sort of map or plan of the places involved in this lane, Superintendent," he said. "I'd thought of doing it myself, with your approval. You see where we are now—at the south-east angle of the Castle enclosure, underneath the walls? Now that path, going away there to the right, through the trees, is the one that leads down to the point where the foreign gentleman who came to see you, Mr. Larsen, says he saw Miss Gilkison meet a tall, slender-built man. He said they went up the path from the road in which they met—that's the road on the north side of the Castle. Well, they'd come up here—if they wanted to get into the Castle Grounds, I'll show you where they could get in—at the same place that Beeman says he saw young Mrs. Marris and the lad who was with her get in. For this," he continued, turning and pointing to another path, leading beneath the walls to the left, "is the alley Beeman spoke of—it goes from here to the Barbican, at the western extremity of the Castle. Come along here and I'll show you how anybody can get into the Castle Grounds, at any time—the Corporation ought to see to it."

He led Hanson along a narrow path, bordered on one side by shrubs and trees and on the other by the outer walls of the Castle until they came to a place, at the side of one of the numerous

flanking towers, where the ancient masonry had fallen, leaving a wide gap through which there was free entrance to the lawns and shrubberies within.

"This is the place Beeman meant," said Turner. "You see, Superintendent, anybody can walk in there! It's a farce, that locking of the outer gates at a certain hour—nobody takes notice of it, for they know they can get out at this hole in the wall. And—where they can get out they can get in!"

Hanson looked at the gap in the wall and at the grounds within.

"Do you think people hang about here late at night, Turner?" he asked.

"Lots!" replied Turner, with assurance. "Sweethearts—and such-like!"

"Well, if that's so," said Hanson, musingly, "if that's really so, Turner, it's a very curious thing that Miss Gilkison's murderer could have killed her here without attracting some attention!"

"I've thought of that," said Turner. "But for one thing I suppose she was attacked suddenly and all unawares and hadn't a chance to cry out. And for another—I don't know if you've had the same idea that I've had, Superintendent, but I have wondered, more than once, what I don't think any of us thought about when the body was discovered."

"What's that?" demanded Hanson.

"Why," replied Turner "if she was actually killed at the place where she was found."

"Yes," said Hanson. "It has crossed my mind, once or twice. But if she was killed elsewhere and brought to where Roberts found her, you know what that would imply? That more than one person was concerned! Look at the situation of this Castle. Except for that one narrow neck of land on the west, connecting it with the street leading to the town, you can't get to it except by stiff climbing on every side! No one man could have carried a dead woman up those slopes! And the neck of land where it's level is commanded by the gateway and the caretaker's lodge."

"I wasn't thinking of her having been murdered outside the Castle," said Turner. "I meant —mayn't she have been murdered at some other part of the grounds and brought to where she was found. It's a big place, this Castle, Superintendent —the ruins and remains are considerable, and the grounds very extensive, with all sorts of nooks and corners in them. Now, a strong man could certainly have dragged a body from——"

"I'll tell you what, Turner!" interrupted Hanson, suddenly. "We'll have a thorough examination of this place made—it should have been done before! We did examine the absolutely immediate surroundings of the spot where we found her, but now we'll have the whole place searched. And you make that plan you mentioned—it may come in

handy. Take a look round now, while you're here."

Leaving Turner to enter the Castle Grounds, Hanson went back to his office. He was clear of the bank-notes trail now, and once more his thoughts turned towards Swarthington. After all, Beeman was probably right—guilt lay at the door of young Mrs. Marris and her mother.

CHAPTER XIII

THE MAN IN BLACK GLOVES

When Hanson reached the police-station he saw a man walking up and down outside its front entrance. His appearance was peculiar. He was a tall, loosely-built man, approaching middle-age and of not over-intelligent aspect; a very ordinary, colourless man, in fact, of the type of which it might safely be said that you will meet hundreds in any morning's stroll through a crowded city. But this was not his peculiarity; that lay in his dress. For while he wore an old-fashioned ulster overcoat of a loud and conspicuous grey check, and a pair of equally loud check trousers showed their extremities beneath it, he also wore a black tie, had a band of black *crêpe* around his high hat (that, in itself, incongruous with the rest of his attire) and on his hands a pair of black, obviously brand-new gloves. And as he walked up and down, his hands worked, and, staring at the pavement, he talked to himself.

Hanson was so certain that this was a visitor who wanted him that, as he reached the door of the police-station, he paused and, waiting until the

man looked up, glanced at him questioningly. The stranger, seeing the superintendent's uniform, hurried forward.

"Are you the Superintendent of Police, sir?" he asked. Then, receiving Hanson's affirmative nod, he went on quickly. "I've been waiting to see you—I've come a long way to see you—all the way from Inverness!"

"Yes?" said Hanson, watching him closely. "About—what?"

The man drew an Edinburgh newspaper from his pocket and pointed to a headline in bold capitals. "This!" he said, a little tremblingly. "Miss —Miss Gilkison!"

"You know something about it?" questioned Hanson.

"About it—no! But about her—yes!" said the man. "To my sorrow, I do!"

"Come in!" said Hanson. He led his visitor to his own private room and closed the door. "Nobody'll interrupt us here," he continued. "Take a chair. Whom have I the pleasure of seeing?"

The man took the offered chair and dropped into it a little wearily. He laid aside his hat and began to draw off the black gloves.

"My name's Moleson," he said. "James Moleson—I'm a commercial. Buyer for a firm of wholesale cloth merchants in the city—Dilford and Waterman, in Greshan Street. I've been up in the Highlands since Wednesday morning, buying

peasant-made homespuns. An out-of-the-way part I was in Wednesday and Thursday, so it wasn't till yesterday, Friday, I heard of this awful affair. I set off at once—travelled all night. Of course, if I had heard sooner, I'd have been here before. But—didn't!"

"You knew Miss Gilkison, I take it?" asked Hanson.

Moleson turned on the superintendent a pair of mournful eyes in which Hanson was quick to see the traces of recent tears.

"I became engaged to be married to her last Tuesday," he answered. "We were to have been married in a month's time."

Hanson managed to control his surprise.

"I'm very sorry for you, Mr. Moleson!" he said, sympathetically. "Very sorry indeed, sir! That's sad! I'd no idea of it. I didn't know the poor lady personally. Dear—dear!"

Moleson drew out a black-bordered handkerchief and wiped his eyes.

"Thank you—thank you!" he said, repressing a sob. "I take it very kind of you! I—I should like to know where she is?"

"Yes," replied Hanson. "Quite natural! Well, Mr. Moleson, after the opening of the inquest—that was on Thursday afternoon, a merely formal affair—her brother, Mr. Gilkison—I don't know if you know him——"

"I knew him years ago—I knew all the family,"

replied Moleson. "We were brought up together —same village."

"Well, Mr. Gilkison removed his sister's remains to Scraythorpe, in Lincolnshire," continued Hanson. "Perhaps that's the village you refer to?"

"It is, sir—that's where we were all brought up together—Gilkisons and Molesons. I have relatives there now—so had she," replied Moleson. "Do you—do you know when the interment is to be, sir?"

"I heard Mr. Gilkison say, Monday," said Hanson. "You'll go there, I suppose?"

"I shall go there as soon as I've left you. But first, sir, can you tell me anything? Who should want to—to—you understand me, sir?"

"I understand!" said Hanson, still more sympathetically. "Very painful for you, Mr. Moleson. Well! it's a strange case, a deep mystery! I've got no definite clue yet. You've read the newspapers, I suppose?"

"I read that Scotch paper last night, sir, before leaving Edinburgh by the night express," replied Moleson, "and I read a Selsborough paper on getting there this morning. You haven't discovered any motive?"

"Not yet," answered Hanson. "I'm making every effort to clear up the matter, and I intend to succeed. But you, Mr. Moleson, can you tell me anything? While I happen to think of it, do you

know of any friend of Miss Gilkison's whom she called Mousie?—a pet name, evidently."

But Moleson shook his head.

"No, sir! no! I don't know of anybody of that designation," he answered. "Clara—she had several friends, lady friends, I mean. It may have been one of them. I never heard her refer to anyone under the name you mention. But then, of course, me and Clara, we hadn't met very often of late. Corresponded, we had—but our meetings had not been what you would call frequent."

Hanson reflected, in silence, for a moment. He was wondering if this man, obviously a very simple soul, knew anything of the village scandal. Then he remembered that Moleson might be able to throw some light on another puzzling question.

"You saw Miss Gilkison last Tuesday, you say?" he asked suddenly.

"I spent the most of the afternoon and evening with her at Selsborough, sir," replied Moleson. "I purposely broke my journey north, from London to Edinburgh, on my way to the Highlands, to do so. I met her at Selsborough—or, rather, she met me, at the station there, at four o'clock, and was with her until a quarter-past eight, when I saw her off by her train to this town. I went on to Edinburgh by the night express from Selsborough —the 10.30."

"Well—while you were with her, did Miss Gilkison mention to you that she'd recently met any-

body here, or about here—some person of whom she knew something?"

"She did not, sir! We talked chiefly of our own concerns. No—she never made mention of anything of that sort."

"Well," said Hanson, after another pause, "do you mind telling me—it's a painful subject, I know, but I want all the information I can lay hands on—about how it was you and Miss Gilkison became engaged that afternoon? No more than you've a mind to, of course."

Moleson pulled a mournful face and shook his head.

"Why, sir," he said, "it came about natural enough. As I've said, we were brought up together, me and Clara; knew each other from childhood. But I'd my living to earn, and she'd hers, and she went one way and I another. Still, we kept meeting now and then, and we always wrote to each other.

"And—well, when we met last Tuesday, we fixed it up. You see, she'd become nicely off, with her annuity and what bit she'd saved, and I've a very good position, and of late I've made arrangements with my firm that all my work is to lie in the north. So we concluded to be married, and to go on living at her house at Swarthington—I should only be away, travelling, at times, and as she'd got a nice place there, we considered it would be a pity for her to remove from it. I'd

nothing to do but go there and hang my hat up, as the saying is, sir—if you understand?"

"I understand," assented Hanson. He was half amused by, half sorry for, the man's evident simplicity, and was trying to reconcile this engagement and marriage with what he had already learnt concerning Miss Gilkison. Then he remembered that Moleson had declared his intention of going to Scraythorpe, and that he would there meet the dead woman's brother, and that Gilkison knew all about the gossip and rumours circulating at Swarthington, and he determined to speak. "Mr. Moleson!" he went on. "This, too, is a painful subject, but I daresay Mr. Gilkison, when you meet him, will mention it to you, so there's no harm in my doing so. You know that Miss Gilkison had been living, alone, in that village for some little time—several months?"

"Since the back-end of last year, yes," assented Moleson.

"Well, did she—has she ever mentioned to you a man named Marris, a neighbour of hers?"

"She has, sir! She told me all about that—last Tuesday. She was an open woman, Clara—not the sort to keep things back."

"May I ask what she told you?"

"You may, sir! She told me, candidly, there'd come to be talk about her and this Marris. All because she'd been friendly to him, driven about

with him a bit, and such-like. But having been bred a villager myself, sir, I know what village folk are—backbiters!"

"She didn't say anything about Marris making love to her?" asked Hanson.

"She didn't, sir. What she said was this—and Clara was a truthful woman—that this Marris was a cleverish man, fond of good talk, and that he'd made a great mistake in marrying some village girl, who, of course, had never been educated and hadn't a word to say for herself. Clara—she'd been neighbourly to him. That's all there was in it."

"Perhaps Miss Gilkison mayn't have perceived that Marris was in love, or falling in love with her?" suggested Hanson.

"I can't say, sir! She was a noticing woman, was Clara. Of course, she said to me that she knew there was talk—she knew, too, that this man's wife and her mother were jealous-like. Now her marriage to me would have put a stop to all of that, sir!"

"Yes, I suppose it would," agreed Hanson. "However, Mr. Moleson, you may as well face the facts! You've mentioned Marris's wife and her mother, a woman named Sabina Clay. It's the popular belief in Swarthington—amongst the labouring people, you know—that either young Mrs. Marris or her mother, or the two of them in

collusion, are responsible for the death of Miss Gilkison—out of revenge! Gilkison knows that—he'll probably talk it over with you."

Moleson, who had retained his black-bordered handkerchief during this conversation, twisted and re-twisted it in his long, thin fingers.

"A cruel thing, sir, if it is so!" he said. "What might your own opinion be?"

"Frankly, I can't say!" replied Hanson. "I'm working at the whole thing, full pressure, and I shall get to a solution, sooner or later, I'll promise you that, Mr. Moleson! We've got a lot of loose strings—if we could only untie some of the knots on them! Now, here's a question which you, perhaps, can answer. You say you saw Miss Gilkison off from Selsborough to Norlanstead by the 8.15 from Selsborough last Tuesday night? Very well! Now did she say anything to you about having an appointment with anybody when she got to Norlanstead? Think!—and before you answer, I'll tell you why I ask. Miss Gilkison arrived at Friarsgate station at 8.57 on Tuesday night, and went down the steps outside, into a street called Cordwainer's Alley, which leads to a junction of roads near an inn called the Cordwainer's Arms. Near the Cordwainer's Arms she was seen to meet a man, a tall, spare-figured man, who, from my information, was obviously waiting for her. She went with this man up a path which leads from the north to the south side of the Castle, over the

shoulder of the Castle hill. That was the last, as far as we know, that was ever seen of her, alive. Now, Mr. Moleson, did she mention anything to you about meeting anyone when she got to Norlanstead?''

Moleson who had listened to this with open-mouthed attention, nodded.

''She did! She said she was going to meet this Marris!''

Hanson, in spite of himself, started in his chair.

''You're sure of that?'' he exclaimed.

''Oh yes, sir! The reason was this—we'd been talking about the distance between Swarthington and Norlanstead, in relation to my journeys when I settled down there, and in discussing it, I asked her how she, for instance, would get back to Swarthington from Norlandstead that night. She replied that she was going to meet Mr. Marris at 9.30, and that he'd drive her home in his car. That'll have been Marris, sir, that met her.''

''No!'' said Hanson, abstractedly. ''No! Marris is a big, broad-shouldered man. This was—— However, we shall find out.''

He talked a little longer to his visitor, helped him to hit on a train for Lincolnshire, and got rid of him. And when Moleson had gone, he sat muttering to himself.

''So she was to meet Marris at 9.30?'' he said. ''And at 9.30 Marris took his car out of the garage and drove down towards the Castle! And at about

9.30 young Mrs. Marris was in the Castle Grounds with a strong and hefty-looking lad! and somewhere in that quarter of the town, was that hellcat, Sabina Clay—now what the devil does it all mean?''

He was still puzzling his brains over that question when, as he sat smoking after his dinner that evening, his maid opened the parlour door and showed in Skelton, who advanced towards his chief with the mysterious air of a man that has news to tell.

CHAPTER XIV

WEASEL DICK

Skelton made sure that the door was closed before he spoke. Then he made an expressive gesture towards the hall behind it.

"I've got a man out there who's something to tell, Superintendent," he said in a significant tone, "something worth hearing, in my opinion."

"Who is he?" asked Hanson.

"A queer character!—but you can depend on his word," replied Skelton. "He's a man who's known at Swarthington as Weasel Dick—his real name's Charlton, Richard Charlton. As to what he is—well, he's a poacher! Been convicted I don't know how many times!—poaching's second nature to him. He's an odd sort, Superintendent, but, as I say, dependable—he'll not tell what isn't true."

"Do you know what it is he has to tell?" inquired Hanson.

"Oh yes, he's told me! It's about Marris and his wife and Miss Gilkison. But I brought him here to tell you—I wanted you to hear it at first hand."

"Bring him in!" said Hanson. "Stop, though!—have I seen him before?"

"I don't think so," replied Skelton. "He hasn't been in our hands lately—either he's been behaving himself better, or he's been too clever to get caught. No, I don't think he's been before the magistrates since you came."

"Well, let's have a look at him," commanded Hanson. "Is he a ready talker?"

"Oh, he'll talk, hard enough!" answered the policeman, smiling. "He's a man who's had a superior education, some time or other—they reckon him a bit of a scholar at Swarthington—sort of man who reads the newspapers regularly—he's no fool, I can assure you!"

Hanson smiled and motioned Skelton to the door, and the policeman, opening it, beckoned to somebody standing without.

"This way, Charlton!" he said. "All right!—nobody but Mr. Hanson here."

Hanson looked towards the door with interested expectancy, which changed to surprise as the poacher entered. Weasel Dick was not at all the sort of man he had thought to see, from Skelton's account of him. Instead of a down-at-heel, shabby, unkempt personage, he saw a middle-aged, intelligent-looking man whose well-worn tweed suit was, at any rate, neat and clean, whose white neckerchief, fastened by a horse-shoe pin, was spotless, who had obviously just shaved and washed himself, and whose boots were scrupulously polished. And when he bade the superin-

tendent a polite good-evening his voice and tone showed that, as Skelton had said, he had at some time somewhere received some better sort of education.

"Good evening," replied Hanson. "Take a chair—sit down, Skelton." He remained silent a moment, eyeing his strange visitor closely. A sudden suspicion that Weasel Dick had once been, if not exactly a gentleman, at any rate, in a very different position, crossed his mind. "Er—will you have a drink?" he said, hospitably. "Will you, Skelton? May as well, you know, while we talk."

"Thank you," replied Weasel Dick. He glanced at Hanson's sideboard, in the centre of which stood a spirit-case. "Whisky, if you please—and water."

Hanson mixed drinks for both men, got one himself, and produced a box of cigars. Then, throwing himself back in his easy chair, and regarding Weasel Dick with a friendly glance, he turned to business.

"Skelton says you've told him something which he wants you to tell me," he said. "You can speak freely, Charlton!"

Charlton, who was obviously enjoying his cigar, smiled.

"Skelton knows me, Mr. Hanson," he said. "I've had dealings with him—we understand each other. You don't know me, but Skelton can assure you that I'm quite truthful——"

"He's done so!" interrupted Hanson. "That's accepted!"

"Well, this is truth that I'm going to tell you," continued Charlton. "It may have something to do with this murder business—it mayn't. Personally, I should say it had! But that's for you to judge. From what Skelton has no doubt told you, you will be aware that a good deal of my work—call it amusement, if you like!—is in the woods, at night. Now Skelton knows, if you don't, that at the back of the late Miss Gilkison's house, Holly Bank, at Swarthington, there is a long strip of woodland which connects with the big wood at the eastern extremity of the village. I am often in that strip of woodland at night—I may tell you that, in addition to following the pursuits which sometimes bring me into conflict with the law, Mr. Hanson, I am a born naturalist and ornithologist. So—sometimes I am in the woods, coppices, plantations for quite legitimate purposes, though it's quite true I don't ask permission to enter and prowl about in them. However, very often of late, when I have been in that particular strip of woodland at the back of Holly Bank, I have seen Mr. Geoffrey Marris come that way from the village, climb the hedge into Miss Gilkison's garden, and gain admittance to her house by the garden door."

"At what time—as a rule?" asked Hanson.

"Evening—after dusk," replied Charlton. "It

struck me at first as a curious thing that he should reach the house by so roundabout a way when he had nothing to do but walk up the road from his own home, three or four hundred yards off! But—there was the fact! It was a fact, too, that when he left, he left by the same way—going back through the strip of woodland, and by the wood below the village—quite a long roundabout way. A secret man, that!"

Hanson nodded, silently. He was getting interested—but he wasn't sure that it wasn't more in the narrator than in the narrative. Weasel Dick, he had soon seen, was a character.

"Well—we come to Monday night last," continued Charlton, after a moment's pause. "I was in that strip of woodland late in the evening—if you want to know what I was there for, it was to see if I was right in a surmise that I'd made, that there were badgers settling there. I heard steps coming along through the undergrowth; they were, of course, Marris's. I'm a past master of all woodcraft, Mr. Hanson, and I took care Marris shouldn't see me. The usual thing happened—he climbed the hedge into the garden of Holly Bank, and disappeared within the side door."

"Admitted by—Miss Gilkison?" asked Hanson.

"So I imagine! The lady kept no indoor servant—her house-work was done by a charwoman, who came a certain number of hours daily," replied Charlton. "Well, now, I'd better explain

to you about the position of that side door, in view of what I'm going to tell you. That door opens on to the garden, at a narrow part of the garden which lies between the side of the house and the hedge separating the garden from the strip of woodland I have referred to. Consequently, the hedge is within four, or at the most five yards from the door. Bear that in mind, in regard to what follows. When Marris came along, climbed the hedge, and went to the garden door —which is set in a porch—I was hidden amongst some shrubs just within the wood, right opposite the door. On the right hand side of that door is a room in which, I conclude, Miss Gilkison spent her evenings—there was always a lamp lighted there, anyway. Now, on this occasion, after Marris had entered the house, I saw his shadow cross the blind of this lighted window; he evidently walked between the window and the lamp. The shadow disappeared; I suppose he sat down on the other side of the lamp. And it was not many minutes after that—perhaps five—that I heard stealthy footsteps in the lower part of the garden."

Charlton paused for a moment, to carefully remove the ash from his cigar. As he resumed, he pointed to the policeman.

"Skelton knows the lie of that garden," he said. "Holly Bank is on a sloping piece of land—the front garden slants down to the highroad that runs on to the Ploughboy Inn and the Crossways

Farm. It was in this front garden that I heard the footsteps—soft, stealthy. They came nearer—and nearer. Now, from long habit, Mr. Hanson, I can see in the dark! I can, at any rate, see in the dark what, perhaps, neither you nor Skelton would. Long practice, you know! Well, I very soon saw, creeping quietly to the house, the figure of a woman—a tall, well-made woman. It came along the wall, got up to the porch, stood there, motionless, awhile—then, with steps as soft as a cat, tiptoed past the porch towards the lighted window. And I saw then that the woman was young Mrs. Marris—Sabina Clay's daughter!"

He paused, as if conscious of the dramatic effect of his last words, and Hanson nodded—as if recognizing it.

"Young Mrs. Marris!" repeated Charlton. "She'd a shawl tightly gathered about her head and neck, but the light was strong from that window and fell full on her face, and I'd no difficulty in recognizing her. And when I had recognized her, I took good care to remain motionless in my hiding place, for I expected—developments! You see, Mr. Hanson, as Skelton can assure you, every man and woman, Tom, Dick, Susan, Betty, in Swarthington, knew that young Mrs. Marris was deadly jealous about her husband and this woman! Isn't it so, Skelton?"

"It is so!" muttered the policeman solemnly. "And been so—some time."

"I expected to see Mrs. Marris break into the house—or, at any rate, to smash the window!" continued Charlton, with a smile. "She did neither. She listened at the door awhile before she approached the lighted window. When she got to the window she examined it carefully, at the sides and the bottom, evidently trying to see into the room. That apparently was no good; she couldn't see anything. She left the window and went round the corner of the house—there's another window in that room that looks out on the back. That, too, yielded her no satisfaction; she came back to the first window. And she hadn't been there many minutes, listening, when she evidently heard something inside, that I, of course, couldn't hear. She sprang back and darted in between some bushes at the side of the porch. A second later, the door in the porch opened, and I saw Miss Gilkison and Marris. What's more, I heard them speak, and what they said. And what I heard, Mrs. Marris couldn't fail to hear!"

"And—that was—what?" asked Hanson.

"Just a bit of quite ordinary stuff. I'll repeat it, word for word. 'Be on the Castle Terrace, then, nine-fifteen to-morrow night,' said Marris. 'Usual place?' said Miss Gilkison. 'All right—you won't mind if I'm a bit late, though I don't know that I shall be.' 'A few minutes'll make no difference, one way or t'other,' said Marris. 'Good night!' He turned away, towards the wood, as he spoke;

Miss Gilkison said good night, went in, and closed the door; I heard her lock and bolt it. Marris climbed the hedge into the wood and went off on his usual track. And a minute later, his wife came quietly out of the bushes and slipped away down the garden; a minute later I heard her, plainly, running down the road towards the Crossways. That's all, Mr. Hanson!''

Hanson sat up in his chair and throwing away the stump of his cigar, looked steadily at his visitor.

''You're a man of superior intelligence, Charlton, whoever you are!'' he said. ''Now, what do you make of all that?''

''That young Mrs. Marris learnt, through her eavesdropping, that Miss Gilkison was to be on the Castle Terrace at Norlanstead at 9.15 the next evening,'' replied Charlton coolly. ''Just that!''

''Yes—yes!'' said Hanson. ''To be sure!'' He reflected during a moment's silence. ''You didn't hear or see any love-making at the porch door?'' he asked.

''There was nothing of that sort!'' replied Charlton. ''Nothing! I've repeated to you every word that passed. Marris sounded—well, apathetic is the word I should use. Miss Gilkison—quite ordinary.''

''You wouldn't have taken them for lovers—parting?''

"I shouldn't! Just an unceremonious affair—between friends."

"And you're sure that Mrs. Marris could overhear what was said?"

"If I could, at five yards' distance, she certainly could at two! She was so close to them that she could almost have touched Marris as he passed her."

Hanson recalled what he had learned from Beeman; it fitted in with the fact on which Charlton had laid stress—that Mrs. Marris knew that Miss Gilkison was to be on the Castle Terrace at 9.15 on Tuesday evening. He rose and helped his two visitors to another drink.

"Well, I'm much obliged to you, Charlton," he said. "For the present keep that to yourself. Now you won't mind my saying a word to you? You've been in a better position, I take it?"

The poacher gave his questioner a sharp, knowing look, full of humour.

"I was what is called a gentleman, once!" he said. "Perhaps I'm still one—of a sort. But I have predatory instincts!"

"I should say you would make an excellent gamekeeper!" said Hanson.

"On the principle of set a thief to catch a thief, eh?" laughed Charlton. "No, no, Mr. Hanson, I think not. I'm quite content. I have a bit of money, and I love liberty and wild life—wood life, bird life, beasts—anything in nature. And if I do fall

foul of land and game laws occasionally—but I've been very well-behaved of late, Skelton, haven't I?"

"No cause of complaint for some time," replied Skelton solemnly. "At least none that I know of!"

"None that he knows of!" repeated Charlton, with a sly look. "I'm a very harmless person, in reality. And I can boast of one thing, Mr. Hanson—if I ever have poached game, damn me if I ever sold what I'd poached!"

"Well—that's to your credit as a sportsman, anyhow!" laughed Hanson. "Glad to hear it!"

He let his visitors out presently, and when they had gone, sat for some time thinking over all that he had learnt during the day—a long and busy one. And it seemed to him that everything was pointing to the guilt of one person—young Mrs. Marris.

CHAPTER XV

IMMOVABLE

Next day was Sunday—a day which Hanson, after a punctilious attendance at the parish church, invariably spent in idling about his garden. But on this Sunday he felt that he must not only be excused from his religious duties, but must also refrain from idleness or pleasure—his job was to press on with his inquiries. And towards the middle of the morning he got out his car and drove off to the Ploughboy at Swarthington, knowing that at that hour he would find its landlord free from his innkeeping labours and able to talk without interruption.

Closeted with Sanders in his private parlour, he told the ex-policeman all about the story which Beeman had set forth to Turner and himself the previous morning. He had a purpose in informing Sanders: the landlord, as a near neighbour of Marris, and living exactly opposite the house, was a likely man to know a good deal about Marris's family affairs. And Sanders, listening closely to the tale, soon showed his knowledge.

"I know who the young fellow would be, Superintendent!" he remarked. "That's easily settled!"

"Who, then?" asked Hanson.

"Mrs. Marris's brother—young Matthew Clay," replied Sanders. "That's who!"

"Didn't know she had a brother!" said Hanson. "Sabina's son, of course!"

"Of course! Year or so older than young Mrs. Marris. Good-looking lad, and a bit of a superior sort—fond of dressing himself smartly, and so on. I used to try to persuade him to go in for the police force at one time, but I couldn't get him to see it. He'd have made a fine, capable policeman."

"Does he live in the village, then?" inquired Hanson.

"No! Not now, anyway. After his sister married Marris, young Matt was employed by his brother-in-law. But they didn't get on—I fancy they began to have rows, through Marris neglecting his wife, as he certainly soon began to do. Anyway, young Matt left Marris last autumn, and the village, too—he's working now for Mr. Holmes, at Copsley. Oh yes—that would be young Matt that Beeman saw!"

Sanders paused—but Hanson saw that he had more in his mind. And the superintendent saying nothing, the landlord, with a significant shake of his head, presently spoke again.

"Rather a suspicious circumstance, that, Mr. Hanson!" he said, "considering!"

"Considering what, Sanders?" asked Hanson.

"Why, that, considering the jealousy there's been on the part of Sabina Clay and her daughter about Miss Gilkison, young Mrs. Marris and her brother Matt should be about Norlanstead Castle at the time Miss Gilkison was murdered!" replied Sanders. "Highly suspicious, I should say!"

"What I want to find out," remarked Hanson, "is—if they really were there!"

"Yes," agreed Sanders. "But you'll not get either of 'em to say! I know these village people, Superintendent! To use one of their own sayings, you might as well try to get butter out of a dog's throat as try to get any information out of village folk if they've once made up their minds to say nothing. Young Mrs. Marris won't say, and young Matt won't say! You'll see!"

"Well—the circumstances are suspicious!" said Hanson.

"Very! More suspicious to me than to you!" assented Sanders, dryly.

"Why more to you than to me?" demanded the superintendent.

"Because I know these people better! It won't have struck you, I daresay, exactly why Sabina, and her daughter, and very likely the son would be jealous about Miss Gilkison? Not quite because

the young wife was being neglected—no! they'd have got over that!"

"What then?" asked Hanson.

"Money!" declared Sanders, oracularly. "Money! They'd be afraid of Marris's money being wasted, as they'd put it, on another woman. Money's first and last with that sort! If they got an idea that Marris was spending money on Miss Gilkison, or giving her money, or wasting money in taking her about, that would touch their susceptibilities much more than the fact that Marris neglected his wife! But you'll have come to some conclusion about this, Superintendent, no doubt?"

"Scarcely—yet," replied Hanson. "I want to find out if Mrs. Marris and this young man—probably her brother, as you suggest—really were at the Castle, and how long, and so on."

"No doubt they were!" said Sanders. "I'll tell you what I think. I think Mrs. Marris had got to know that her husband met Miss Gilkison there sometimes—it's well known here that he used to drive her home in his car from Norlanstead late at night now and then—and she went there, with her brother, on that particular night to watch! But . . . whether she and young Matt saw anything, whether they know anything, whether they've a secret that you'd give a lot to have unfolded, you'll not get to know! From them, direct, anyhow—sure as my name's Sanders—which it is!"

"I'll have a try, anyhow!" retorted Hanson. "How do you get to Copsley from here, and how far it is, and where is Mr. Holmes's farm, when you get there?"

Sanders took him to a map of the district which hung on the parlour wall, and indicated the route to Copsley and the particular house he wanted.

"This Holmes," asked Hanson, as he prepared to set out, "is he the sort of man you can take into your confidence?"

"Oh, he's all right—a smart man!" replied Sanders. "You can talk to him."

"Because, after all, this young Clay may not have been the fellow who was with Mrs. Marris," suggested Hanson. "In that case——"

"I fancy you'll find out that he was!" said Sanders, dryly. "Though—mark me!—you'll not get it out of him, Superintendent. Close lot, that!"

Hanson remarked that there were more methods than one, and, driving off, pulled up half-an-hour later at an old farmstead on the outskirts of a small village. A middle-aged, shrewd-eyed man came out and looked him over with evident recognition.

"Good morning, sir," said Hanson. "Mr. Holmes, I believe."

"That's me, sir," replied the farmer. "I know you by sight—Mr. Hanson."

"Exactly—and you know my job, then," answered the superintendent. "I want a word with

you, Mr. Holmes. You have in your employ a young man named Clay, Matthew Clay—son of Sabina Clay, at Swarthington?"

"I have, sir! Had him for some time," assented Holmes.

"Well," continued Hanson, "you know all about this murder at Norlanstead Castle last Tuesday night, of course, Mr. Holmes?—you'll have read about it, and heard it discussed, no doubt. To be sure!—everybody has. Well, now, I've received information that this young Matthew Clay was seen near the Castle on Tuesday night, about the time that this unfortunate woman was known to be there, and I'd like to ask him a question or two as to whether he saw or heard anything of her. But first of all, can you tell me if he was in Norlanstead that evening?"

"I can, sir! He was. He took some cattle into town for me that afternoon, and he asked to stop the evening there. As a matter of fact—he's an indoor servant, you understand—he never came home that night, though he was here to his work first thing next morning. Oh yes, he was in Norlanstead that evening—and night, too, I should imagine."

"Can I see him?" asked Hanson.

The farmer jerked his thumb towards a wing of his old house.

"Our men are just having their Sunday dinner," he said. "I daresay, though, they've about

finished. Now will you come in, Mr. Hanson, or shall I send him out here?"

"Thank you—I daresay he'll talk more freely here," replied Hanson. "If you don't mind."

"Mind naught!" said Holmes. He gave the superintendent a knowing look as he turned towards the house. "Can't promise about his talking freely anywhere, though!—they can keep their own counsel, these folks, if they're minded to!"

He disappeared into his front door, and Hanson waited for some minutes. Then, from around a corner of the house came, slowly, a sturdily-built, good-looking young fellow in whose general appearance Hanson was quick to recognize a strong resemblance to Mrs. Marris. Looking him over closely as he came across the lawn to the entrance gate, Hanson felt sure that this was the man Beeman had seen with Mrs. Marris on the Castle Terrace. For Matthew Clay, this being Sunday, was attired in his best clothes, and wore just what Beeman had described in the way of hat, overcoat and muffler. But while Beeman had not seen his face, Hanson had a full view of it, and he was at once aware of suspicion, dislike, and sullenness; the warnings of Sanders and more recently of Holmes at once occurred to him.

"Unpromising!" he muttered to himself. "Sulky!"

He said nothing until Matthew Clay came up to the side of the car. And then he tried to disarm

suspicion and encourage confidence by speaking cheerily.

"Good morning, my lad!" he said. "Hope I haven't interrupted your dinner?—I shan't keep you many minutes."

But Hanson got no response to his advances. Clay stood glowering at him—the incarnation of unwillingness and resentment.

"What might you be wanting of me?" he growled.

"Just to ask you a question or two," replied Hanson. "You've heard about this murder at Norlanstead Castle last Tuesday night?"

"I've heard of it!"

"Well, I've heard, on good authority, that you were walking with your sister, Mrs. Marris, of Swarthington, on the Castle Terrace that night," said Hanson. "Is that so?"

Clay gave him a half-averted glance.

"I suppose I've a right to walk there, or anywhere else, with my own sister, haven't I?" he muttered.

"Every right," said Hanson. "All I want to ask you, Clay, is just this— Did you see anything of the woman who was murdered—Miss Gilkison?"

If he had expected any hesitation on Clay's part in replying to this question, he was speedily deceived. Clay replied at once, defiantly.

"I shan't say anything! I'm going to say

naught about it. That affair's naught to do with me! None o' my business!"

"What harm can it do you—if you did see Miss Gilkison?—to say so?" suggested Hanson. "None!"

But Clay shook his head.

"No!" he said. "I shall say naught!" He half turned away. "Is there aught more that you want?"

"I should like you to remember that you can be put in a witness-box, my lad!" answered Hanson. "You'd have to speak, then!"

"There's nobody can make me say what I don't want to!" retorted Clay. "I've naught to say in this matter—to you or anybody. I reckon my tongue's my own!—either in a witness-box or here. I'll wish you a good-morning!"

He turned back to the house, despite Hanson's entreaty to him to stay a moment longer. As he disappeared round the corner from which he had come, the farmer came out of his front door and back to Hanson. He gave the superintendent a sly look.

"Get aught out of him?" he asked.

"Nothing!" replied Hanson. "Not a word!"

Holmes leaned his arms on the side of the car, and nodding his head towards the opposite side of the highway, indicated a row of fine old oaks ranged in front of his garden and orchards.

"See them oak-trees, Mr. Hanson?" he asked laconically.

"I see them—yes!" replied Hanson. "Very fine —and old, too! Splendid specimens."

"Aye!" said Holmes. "Two or three hundred years old, that lot! Well, Mr. Hanson, you might as well hope to pull up one o' those oaks with your bare fingers as expect to get an answer out of our country people if they've made up their minds not to give one! I know 'em!—you don't!"

"I'm beginning to!" said Hanson. "Close!"

"Close? Aye—they're close!" laughed Holmes. "If they're minded to talk, they'll talk—thirteen to the dozen! If they're minded to hold their tongues, they'll hold 'em! Take heed o' that!"

"I suppose some of them know something!" remarked Hanson.

"Know?" said the farmer, with a cynical laugh. "Aye—you may lay your last penny on that, sir! I'll bet there's folks in Swarthington who knows beyond question who killed that poor woman!—but they'll not tell you, Mr. Hanson! No, sir—mum's the word! However, here I am, forgetting my manners!—my wife sent me out to say that we're just sitting down to dinner—as fine a bit o' roast beef as ever you laid knife to!—will you join us?"

"Thank you, I wish I could!" replied Hanson. "But you'll understand that I'm run off my feet

with this job—it occupies every minute. Make my excuses to Mrs. Holmes, and thank her."

"Well—a drop o' whisky, or a glass of ale, now?" suggested Holmes. "You can spare five minutes!"

But Hanson was obdurate and drove off. His morning had proved profitless—unless, indeed, it had suggested to him that young Matt Clay knew something which he might eventually be made to disclose. But did he? Or was his reticence merely due to that mulish obstinacy which Hanson was discovering to be a main characteristic of the rustic population of that neighbourhood? That remained to be proved—but in Hanson's opinion Clay knew something.

Meanwhile, on his arrival home again, there was another thread to take hold of. Turner was awaiting him, and Turner had made a discovery at the Castle.

CHAPTER XVI

MOUSIE

The plain-clothes man's first proceeding was to draw from his pocket and spread out on Hanson's desk a large sheet of paper on which he had made a rough chart of the grounds of Norlanstead Castle.

"This is the map you asked me to make, Superintendent," he said. "I can't say that it's drawn to scale!—but it'll serve to explain certain things: it's got all the approaches, paths, and so on indicated. And it'll be useful now in explaining certain things to you. For I've been all over the grounds this morning, and I've made a couple of discoveries that seem to be important."

"Relating to the crime?" asked Hanson.

"I should say very much so!" replied Turner. "Now, if you'll just glance at the map—there, marked by a couple of crosses, is the place where there's a gap in the wall at which it's so easy to get into the grounds after closing time, or, indeed, at any time. Anybody entering that way after going through a belt of shrubbery would pass the ruins of the old chapel—St. Wigbert's—which are fairly considerable, and stand by the side of the

path leading towards the keep. Now, I had a careful look inside that chapel this morning, and lying in a corner, where it had obviously been thrown amidst other rubbish, I found—this!"

Hanson drew his breath sharply as Turner produced from an outer pocket a small paper-wrapped parcel and took from it a length of green rope.

"Good God!" he exclaimed. "That! Again?"

Turner spread his find on the desk, and put a finger to it.

"You'll notice two or three things about that bit of rope, Superintendent," he said quietly. "The first is—it's not very long. It measures exactly nineteen and a half inches. The second is, it's been cut from a longer piece by an extremely sharp knife—a clean cut, with no fraying. The third is that, like the piece with which Miss Gilkison was strangled, it's brand-new—never been used."

"What do you argue from this find, Turner?" asked Hanson.

"Seems to me, Superintendent, that it proves a good deal of deliberate premeditation on the part of the murderer!" replied Turner. "It's surely very evident that he——"

"Or she!" interrupted Hanson.

"To be sure! Or she—went to the Castle with the definite purpose of strangling Miss Gilkison, and took there a piece of that green clothes-line

with which to do the job! Waiting there for her coming, he, or, as you say, she thought the piece of line too long to be easily handled, and so cut off this end and threw it aside. Careless, no doubt, but there it is."

"What's your other discovery?" inquired Hanson.

"Perhaps no less important," said Turner. He drew out an old pocket-book, and from one of its folds produced an envelope, the front of which was printed and embellished with the picture of a shop. "Look at that, Superintendent!" he continued. "I picked up that in the shrubbery near the old chapel! You see what the envelope's got on—picture of Bernstein's hair-dressing establishment in Market Street, *et cetera.* Inside the envelope—if you'll open it—are three ladies' hair-nets, dark brown shade in colour. New—unused—of course! Been dropped by somebody, where I found it."

Hanson opened the envelope and glanced at its flimsy contents.

"Well?" he said.

"Although it's Sunday," continued Turner, "I went round to Bernstein's. He lives over his shop. I went to his private door, and finding him at home, showed him this find and asked if he could remember selling these hair-nets to any customer lately. He identified them at once, because of the somewhat unusual shade of brown. He said posi-

tively that he sold them last Tuesday afternoon to young Mrs. Marris!"

"He knows her?" asked Hanson.

"Quite well! Buys these things from him regularly. He didn't hesitate a minute in identifying the nets—he remembered the sale distinctly. Those, he said, were the only hair-nets of that particular shade he'd sold for some time—in fact, he declared that Mrs. Marris was the only customer he had who asks for that shade. So—there you are!"

Hanson sat silent for some time staring at the bit of green rope and the brown hair-nets. Suddenly he rose, and going to his safe, brought out the length of line which had been taken under his superintendence from the dead woman's neck. He brought it over to the desk.

"There's no doubt your piece of rope has been cut from this, Turner," he said, after an examination of the two pieces. "I should say you're right in your conjecture. But look here—it's positive that an unusually sharp knife, a powerful knife, not an ordinary pen or pocket knife, has been used! Do you see what a perfectly clean cut it's been?—no fraying!"

"I see! What of it?" asked Turner.

"No woman carries a knife of that sort!" said Hanson. "See the point?"

Turner nodded—but the nod turned to a shake of his head.

"Mrs. Marris had a man with her!" he said. "A young man!"

"The young man, Turner, was her brother!" remarked Hanson. "I've as good as proved that. Her brother—Matthew Clay."

Turner's eyebrows arched themselves, and he let out a whistle of surprise, mingled with comprehension.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "I'm beginning to see! Superintendent, it's been a family job! Jealousy—revenge—fear that the other woman was leading Marris off! Seems to me, Superintendent, to be getting clear!"

"I'm beginning to think so," assented Hanson. "But I'll tell you what I've been doing and what I've heard since I saw you yesterday." He went on to tell Turner of Weasel Dick's visit to him on the previous evening, and of his own visits to Swarthington and Copsley that morning. "Now—what do you make of all that?" he concluded. "Does it lead you anywhere?"

"It leads me to what I should consider a satisfactory conclusion," replied Turner, with decision. "It's been a put-up job between young Mrs. Marris and her brother to get rid of the rival! Whether the mother was in it or not is another question. But that's been it!"

"It may turn out to be so," said Hanson.

"What's to be done—next?" asked Turner, after watching his chief expectantly during

a momentary silence. "To my mind, it's certain!"

Hanson pointed to the pieces of green rope.

"As I've told you before, Turner, one of those green clothes-lines was stolen from Mrs. Grading's yard, close by the Castle Grounds, on the evening, or night of the murder," he said. "Now, let's suppose that this young Matthew Clay stole it—with what purpose you can guess? Here are two portions of it—where's the rest of the line? We know that he and his sister came along from the direction of the town, where, undoubtedly, they'd met after she and her mother parted, and that they approached the Castle by way of the alley that passes the Barbican and emerges on the terrace. Now just before they reached the Barbican, they'd pass the wall of Mrs. Grading's yard. Let's suppose that young Clay, seeing no one about, got over the wall and stole the line from Mrs. Grading's posts—she showed me where and how it was stretched, and it could have been taken down in a second or two—where, if he so took it, is the rest of it? If we could find that——"

"There are no end of places in and about the Castle where that could have been thrown, Superintendent!" said Turner, with a somewhat dismal air. "Long job, that! There's holes, cavities, fissures in the rocks! Lord, you could hide no end of things in that old place, and nobody'd ever find 'em!"

"Well, but this is certain," persisted Hanson. "If this line—of which we've two pieces here—is the one stolen from Mrs. Grading's yard, the other portion must not only be somewhere, but it must have been severed from these parts between the theft and the murder! This is how I figure it—the line, intact, was taken from Mrs. Grading's yard. The thief—and murderer-to-be—cut off from it what he judged suitable for his purpose. On reaching the Castle, he used his knife again, thinking what he had first cut off too long to be handled easily, and he threw that piece away, carelessly—you've found it, and there it is! But—the main piece must be somewhere about. You'll have to make a further and more exhaustive search, Turner!"

"A stiff job!" muttered Turner. "Several acres of ground, and all those ruins!"

"It'll have to be done," declared Hanson. "Get help. And now here's another thing. I want to find out whether this young Matthew Clay spent last Tuesday night here in the town, and if so, where? If he did, it can be ascertained. Never mind this being Sunday—see to both these things at once. I've another matter to attend to this afternoon."

What Hanson had in mind, and meant to do before evening, was to make another visit to Miss Gilkison's house at Swarthington, the keys of which were still in his possession, there to go

through the dead woman's effects and papers more carefully than on his first visit. But as he sat smoking and thinking after his dinner—which, on Sundays, he always took at the unusual hour of three o'clock—he was aware of a taxi-cab drawing up outside his gate, of a fashionably-attired lady stepping from it, and of her approaching his front door. A moment later his maid presented a card: *Mrs. Hatton, 37A Colesworth Mansions, Notting Hill Gate, London, W.*11.

Hanson was quick to seize a situation. He seized this. Mousie, of course! He made swiftly for the hall, to confront a good-looking, middle-aged woman, who, in direct contradiction to the affectionate diminutive applied to her by her dead friend, was plump and stately, and anything but a mouse.

"Come in, if you please, Mrs. Hatton," said Hanson. He escorted her to the room he had just left and, closing the door, handed his visitor a chair. "Am I right in supposing that you are the lady whom the late Miss Gilkison addressed as Mousie?"

Mrs. Hatton smiled.

"Well, you know, Mr. Hanson," she replied, "Miss Gilkison and I were very old friends!—we'd known each other, intimately, for I can't say how many years. That was her pet name for me—and when I saw your advertisement in the papers yesterday, I thought I'd better come here and see

you, for I felt sure that you'd a special reason for wanting to get in touch with me."

"I have!" said Hanson. "A very special reason!" He went over to his safe and got out the unfinished letter which he had found on Miss Gilkison's table at Holly Bank, the morning after the murder. "Look at that, Mrs. Hatton," he continued, after telling her the circumstances. "Now, can you give me any idea—have you any idea—of what it was she referred to?"

Mrs. Hatton read over the few lines, and laying the letter aside, opened her hand-bag.

"Well," she answered, producing an envelope, "I have, Mr. Hanson! The fact is that on Wednesday evening last, I got a letter from Miss Gilkison! I've brought it with me—here it is, for you to read and consider. You'll notice that it's hastily scribbled, in pencil, and where it was written. I think you'll find that it explains a good deal."

She handed the superintendent a sheet of paper obviously torn from a small writing-pad, and Hanson, turning to the window, read carefully what was on it:

"Dear Mousie,

"I'm writing this in a hurry on the train between Norlanstead and Selsborough, so that I can post it in Selsborough as soon as I get there. I want you to get it. I began writing to you before leaving home this morning, but hadn't time to finish. I'm very much bothered

about something that's happened. Two days ago I was in Norlanstead, and whom do you think I came face to face with in a shop? You'd never guess in a twelve-month! *Bruerley!* I knew him at once, though it's so many years —seven isn't it?—since the affair happened. And he knew me—and showed it! He went as white as a sheet. He came up and asked if he could have a word with me, and presently followed me into the street—a quiet one. He begged and implored me not to give him away; said he could explain everything and so on. He's living here in Norlanstead as a sort of retired gentleman under the name of Bassett, and looks quite well-dressed and comfortable. Knowing what I do I don't know what to do about it. He was always plausible, as you'll remember. He's begged me to give him a few minutes to-night, on my return from Norlanstead; he says he can explain more. What would you do? Ought I to tell the police? It seems a mean thing to do, but you know what we all thought at the time. Write to me at once and give me your advice—in haste,

"Clara."

Hanson read this letter twice over. For a moment or two he stood thinking—recalling all that he knew of Miss Gilkison's movements on the evening of her death, and reflecting on certain other facts now known to him. Suddenly, he turned to his visitor.

"Now, Mrs. Hatton!" he said, quietly. "Just tell me all you know about the man mentioned in this letter—Bruerley, or, as he's known here, Bassett!"

CHAPTER XVII

FROM THE PAST

Mrs. Hatton appeared to reflect a little, and before replying turned on her questioner with a question of her own.

"Well, Mr. Hanson," she said, "before I tell you anything, I'd like to know something myself! I suppose there's no doubt about what Clara Gilkison, poor thing, says in this letter. About Bruerley, or, as she says he now calls himself, Bassett?"

"There's no doubt whatever that a man who is known as Mr. Bassett lives in this town!" replied Hanson.

"You know him?"

"I've met him—to speak to—just once, at the house where he boards. A Mrs. Grading's, a very respectable woman."

"What sort of man is he in appearance, Mr. Hanson?"

"Tall, slender man, rather over middle-age. Looks like an actor—clean-shaven, that sort. Good-looking. Good address—an educated man, I should think. Good manners, of the old-fashioned sort."

"That sounds like Bruerley! How long has he been here, and what is he supposed to do, Mr. Hanson?"

"He's been here, at Mrs. Grading's, a year or two, I believe, Mrs. Hatton. I don't think he's supposed to do anything!—sort of retired gentleman. A very quiet, retiring man, I should say."

"Well, he must be Bruerley! Of course, he will be Bruerley! Clara Gilkison wouldn't say he was Bruerley if he wasn't. And it shows what a small world it is that he and she should meet in this town! I can quite believe, too, that he'd be far, very far, from pleased to see her! Yes, indeed—considering!"

"Considering what, Mrs. Hatton? I'm waiting to hear all about it."

"Well, it's a long story, Mr. Hanson. I've already told you that Clara Gilkison and I are very old friends—known each other a great many years. Now, seven years ago, Clara was still with the old lady who left her her little fortune—annuity it was, and a very nice one—she'd been with her some years then, and had still some years longer before the old lady died. That was near Aylesbury, in Buckinghamshire. And I was in service close by, as housekeeper to Lord Siddlescombe, at Siddlescombe Abbey; consequently, Clara and I kept up our friendship and saw each other regularly. And as for Bruerley, he was house-steward to my employer—that's when Clara

and I got to know him. I don't know where Bruerley had been in service before he came to Siddlescombe Abbey, but I do know that Lord Siddlescombe, who was what I call a far too easy-going gentleman, had a great belief in him—he was a very plausible man, Bruerley, very soft with his tongue, and of very ingratiating manners—and he trusted him far too much. As, at last, he found out and had reason to regret!"

"Took advantage of his master's confidence, I suppose?" suggested Hanson.

"That was what it came to," asserted Mrs. Hatton. "Lord Siddlescombe went away for the better part of a year, big-game-shooting in Africa, and he left things pretty much in Bruerley's hands; he certainly had full control of the house and household, and there was nobody to say him nay, because Lord Siddlescombe was, in those days, a bachelor. Now, I ought to tell you that at Siddlescombe Abbey there are—or, I should say were!—a lot of very valuable curiosities, objects of art, and so on; there was one small room there, opening out of the great drawing-room, in which there were valuables, pictures, miniatures, and the like worth a vast sum of money. Of course, Bruerley had the keys of everything—as I say, he was virtual master in my lord's absence. And one morning, not so very long before my lord was due to return, he announced that there'd been a burglary during the night, and a quantity of extremely

valuable objects had disappeared. He called the local police in, and my lord's solicitor came down, and a detective was fetched from Scotland Yard, and there was a fine to-do. But nothing had been done in the way of an arrest by the time Lord Siddlescombe returned, and it looked pretty much as if the burglar or burglars had got clean away and would never be found. Then, all of a sudden, a few weeks after my lord had got back, there was a fine sensation! Bruerley was arrested!"

"He was the burglar, eh?" suggested Hanson, with a smile.

"Well, those who arrested him thought so," said Mrs. Hatton. "Whether he really was, I should say nobody but himself knows! But his arrest came about in this way: my lord wasn't at all satisfied with the local police, nor with the Scotland Yard people, so he called in, all unknown to anybody, a private detective, some man who made a profession of that sort of thing and whom you couldn't tell from a gentleman, Mr. Hanson! I took him for one of my lord's friends when he came down to stay at the Abbey, but he was, of course, spying round. Well, he traced some of the more valuable things to Bruerley—Bruerley had sold them to a man in London who had a trade with collectors, both in this country and America. Of course, I don't recollect all the details—I know that my lord told me that there wasn't the least

doubt of Bruerley's guilt—but I do remember Bruerley being arrested, for I was present!"

"Ah! and how did he take it?" inquired Hanson.

"Very badly! You'd have thought he was the most deeply wronged man under the sun!" replied Mrs. Hatton, smiling. "He didn't make much to-do—it was the sort of injured innocence business. However, they took him away, and he was brought before the magistrates next morning, and remanded. And the next thing we heard was that he'd escaped!"

"Escaped!" exclaimed Hanson. "What—soon after?"

"He escaped within an hour of being remanded," said Mrs. Hatton. "Of course, I can't remember all the details, but as far as I can bring the matter to mind, he was put in a cell to await transfer to somewhere or other, and when a policeman took his dinner to the cell, he'd vanished! I recollect what a commotion there was, and how they searched for him, but it was all no good. As far as I'm aware, Mr. Hanson, he's never been heard of again until Clara Gilkison came across him in this town! And I'm sure she'd not be mistaken. In fact, her letter shows that the man admitted that he was Bruerley!"

Hanson was thinking. Here was another clue! Bruerley, *alias* Bassett, fugitive from justice, was

something different from Bassett, the harmless, quiet, retired gentleman. And he lodged at Mrs. Grading's—and from Mrs. Grading's yard the green clothes-line had disappeared!

"You'd know this man if you saw him, Mrs. Hatton?" he asked, turning to his visitor. "You'd have no difficulty in recognizing him?"

"If Clara Gilkison recognized him so readily, I don't see any reason why I shouldn't!" replied Mrs. Hatton. "And, of course, I knew him much better than she did. She only saw him now and then, when she came to see me at Siddlescombe Abbey. I lived under the same roof with him, and saw him every day. Oh yes, Mr. Hanson, I should know him!"

"Well—you've come all the way from London," said Hanson. "What are your arrangements?"

"I shall stay at an hotel in this town, to-night," replied Mrs. Hatton. "To-morrow I intend going on to see some relations of mine near Selsborough: I haven't seen them for years, and I may as well take the opportunity of doing so, now I'm in this part of the country. I shall stay with them for a week, at least, so if you want to see me again——"

"I want you to see this man," said Hanson. "We must try to arrange it before you leave to-morrow. By-the-bye, is he aware of the fact that Miss Gilkison called you Mousie?"

"No, I'm sure he's not!" replied Mrs. Hatton.

"He'd never hear it from her at the time we knew him. Oh no!"

"Glad to hear it!" remarked Hanson. "His suspicions might have been aroused by seeing that name in the papers. Evidently they hadn't—he thinks himself safe since Miss Gilkison's death!"

Mrs. Hatton gave Hanson a significant glance.

"Well, Mr. Hanson!" she said. "Knowing all we know, you and I—do you think Bruerley had anything to do with that death?"

"What should you say?" asked Hanson.

"I should say, from my recollection of him, that he's not the man to stop at anything to ensure his own safety!" said Mrs. Hatton. "Unscrupulous!"

"Well, we'll see!" said Hanson. "What you've told me puts a totally new complexion on affairs. Now, about your arrangements—you understand that we shall be responsible for your expenses? Let me recommend you to put up at the Fleece—you'll find it a very comfortable hotel. Now, about seeing this man. I happen to know that he's a regular attendant at the parish church—he'll be there at the evening service. I'll call for you, Mrs. Hatton, at a quarter-past six and take you to that service, and give you the opportunity of seeing him. I know where he always sits, and you shall see him without his seeing you. And if you identify him as Bruerley, well, then I shall know what to do!"

Mrs. Hatton went off to the Fleece, and Hanson

proceeded to put his ideas in order. He was fond of tabulating things, and he jotted down certain memoranda as soon as he was left alone—that, he said, gave him the hang of the matters more clearly:

1. Clara Gilkison recognizes in Bassett a man whom she had known as Bruerley, who had made a sensational escape from custody seven years previously and had never been heard of since.

2. She made an appointment to meet Bruerley, alias Bassett, on her return from Selsborough.

3. *Probably* he was the man whose meeting with Miss Gilkison was witnessed by Larsen. If so,

4. Bassett and Miss Gilkison went up to the Castle, where, next morning,

5. Miss Gilkison was found dead—strangled by a length of green clothes-line.

6. Now a green clothes-line had been stolen that night from the yard of Mrs. Grading's house, close to the Castle, in which house Bassett was a boarder.

The young Mrs. Marris theory faded out of Hanson's mind as he reflected on this memorandum; it seemed to him, since Mrs. Hatton's coming, that the Bassett theory was more likely to prove correct. Bassett, according to the ex-housekeeper, an unscrupulous man who would stick at nothing to ensure his own safety, had put Miss Gilkison out of the way to make certain of her silence. Very well—but murder will out! And at a

quarter to six o'clock Hanson set out for the Fleece Hotel.

On his way thither he stopped at the police-station. There was always somebody in charge there, day or night, Sunday or week-day. On this particular Sunday evening it was Turner. Turner, at sight of his chief, prepared to narrate some further doings of his at the Castle that afternoon, but Hanson stopped him—that could wait. He had already made up his mind what to do about Bassett. If Mrs. Hatton positively identified him as the man she had known as Bruerley, he would arrest him there and then, and hold him until he had communicated with the police-station in Buckinghamshire from which he had effected his escape, and in the meantime consider further the possible charge of murder against him. So now he arranged with Turner to send two plain-clothes men to the evening service at the parish church, and that done went on his way once more to join Mrs. Hatton.

But Hanson never reached Mrs. Hatton. Before he had got to the Fleece, an old-world hostelry in the Market-Place, he suddenly caught sight of Larsen who was hailing him frantically with lifted arm and waving stick from the opposite pavement, and appeared to be in a high state of excitement. The Norwegian came running across.

"I have found him—I have found him!" he cried, pantingly, as he drew near the superin-

tendent. "The man what I see with Miss—the poor murdered woman with the queer name—oh yes, it is the very man!—I know him at last by his hat—a big, very big hat. I was running to tell you I have found him!"

Hanson drew him aside into a convenient passage, out of the way of the passers-by, who were beginning to stare.

"Steady!" he said. "Go slow, Larsen! Where did you find this man?"

"I see him by the Castle—walking! It comes to me at once—that is the man! Tall, spare—but his hat! It is a big hat. Great—what you call it? —brim! Yes, oh yes, there is no doubt it is the man!"

"Did you follow him?"

"Follow him? I speak to him! I say, 'You are the man I see with the poor woman who was murdered! You come with me, just now, to the police—come!' "

Hanson repressed a growl of vexation. Larsen went on, still excited.

"But he shakes his head at me—motions me away, eh? Walks on—well, I follow him! Yes, till he goes into a house. You come now, Hanson—I show you where he lives, that man! Oh yes, it is the same!"

"How long ago was this?" asked Hanson.

"How long?—ten, twelve, fifteen minutes—just now! This way—you come?"

"I'm coming!" said Hanson.

He knew quite well where Larsen would lead him—to Mrs. Grading's. And he knew, too, what answer Mrs. Grading would give him when he presently knocked at her door.

"Mr. Bassett, Mr. Hanson?" said that lady. "Mr. Bassett's just gone out! He came in not so long since, went up to his room, came down and went out again—I suppose he's gone to church. Did you come down the street? Why, you ought to have met him!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CORDED BOX

Hanson stifled a groan of discomfiture—but the look he turned on Larsen was by no means approving.

"You've been a bit too previous there!" he said, drawing the Norwegian out of hearing of Mrs. Grading. "He's off! You shouldn't have mentioned the police to him."

"But it is—oh, just a few minutes ago!" protested Larsen. "He cannot be off as you call it! No—he is in there, in the house. He is hiding!"

"If Mrs. Grading says he's out, he's out," said Hanson. He turned back to the landlady. "Did you see which way he went, ma'am?" he asked.

"I didn't!" replied Mrs. Grading. "But I saw him go out!—I was at the back of the hall when he came downstairs and I saw him leave. Of course, I can't think why you didn't meet him if you came down the street, because he'll have gone up there to church—he always goes to church, Sunday evening."

Hanson made some remark about going up to the church; when Mrs. Grading had gone in and closed her door, he drew Larsen away.

"Slipped us!" he muttered. "A few minutes, you said, my friend! Um—I've known a man make himself scarce in a few seconds! And—there's cover close at hand here! Look there!"

He pointed to the Castle, close by, reflecting that a man could reach the shelter of its ruins, its belts of wood, its shrubberies in less than a minute from Mrs. Grading's, could cross the grounds and escape into the lower parts of the town, or the other side, with the greatest ease. And then he remembered something else—that there were two railway stations at Norlanstead, and that both lay beyond the Castle. At the recollection he pulled out a local railway guide, and within a minute had ascertained that a train for Selsborough left one station at 6.30 and a train for Wickerfield and the south left the other at 6.35. He turned sharply to Larsen.

"Here!" he said. "You can make yourself of use! You know Friarsgate Station?—up the lane in front of the Cordwainer's Arms. If you see this man there, point him out to the station-master, porters, anybody—tell them the police want him—stop him from leaving! If he isn't there, come back to the police office. Run! you've not much time!"

Larsen sped away in the desired direction, evidently keen on his job, and Hanson, feeling that it was the only thing to do, turned down a lane that led to the other station at Castledyke. He went

leisurely, having more time, and as he went he reflected on Bassett's disappearance—surely it was a sign of guilt! Who but a guilty man would have taken fright and run off at Larsen's excited exclamation? And he had gone quickly, too—probably he had only turned into Mrs. Grading's to get money from his room; Larsen's mere mention of the police had been sufficient to transform him into an immediate flight-seeking fugitive. Probably, too, Bassett had foreseen that some surprise of this sort might occur and had made arrangements accordingly. In that case, he would not be found at either of the railway stations—his plans would provide for some super-method of quitting the town. Still, there was the chance—and if he had thought to escape by the railway, it would have to be by one of the two trains which Hanson had mentioned to Larsen, for there were no more out of Norlanstead that evening; the next was one which passed through Friarsgate at six in the morning.

Bassett was not to be seen at Castledyke Station. Hanson purposely made no inquiry; the station was a small one, and there were few people on its platform. But he waited until the train came in, and he watched every person who got into it—there was no Bassett there. At that he went quickly back to the police-station; a few minutes later Larsen came hurrying there, crestfallen.

"No!" he panted, having evidently run all the way. "I don't see him at all. Nowhere!"

"Didn't think you would," said Hanson. "Neither did I! But now we know—he hasn't gone away by train. Still, there are other means —taxi-cabs, conveyances. We'll see to that!"

He was getting some of his men together; presently he dispersed them through the town, making inquiries. That done, and Larsen (whom he was secretly cursing for his over-zealous meddling) got rid of with instructions to keep his eyes and ears open and his mouth shut, Hanson remembered Mrs. Hatton and went off to the Fleece. He found the ex-housekeeper attired for church attendance, and he made a wry face at her.

"No church to-night, ma'am!" he said. "He's flown!"

Mrs. Hatton threw up her neatly-gloved hands.

"You don't mean it!" she exclaimed. "Then—you've been after him already?"

Hanson explained matters. Mrs. Hatton nodded her fashionable hat.

"Ah!" she said, knowingly. "Just like what it says in the Proverbs, Mr. Hanson! *The wicked flee when no man pursueth!*"

"To be sure, ma'am!—sound sense in that, Proverbs or no Proverbs," agreed Hanson. "Didn't take much to frighten him, anyway! Of course, the mere mention of the police did it!—he saw, no doubt, that Larsen would come straight

to me, and he knew I should at once pay him a visit, and—well, he'd no desire to be visited. So —off and away!"

"Of course, you'll look for him?" said Mrs. Hatton.

"Got three trusty men on that job now," replied Hanson. "And I myself am just going to do a little investigation. I shall call in again, ma'am, later in the evening. Sorry I haven't had the pleasure of escorting you to church."

He went back to the police-station, and bidding Turner to accompany him, walked down to Mrs. Grading's. That lady, opening her door in person, showed concern at the sight of these two visitors.

"Is anything wrong, Mr. Hanson?" she inquired anxiously. "Mr. Bassett——"

"Not come in again, Mrs. Grading?" asked Hanson. "No? Well, he won't! You may as well know it—I want Bassett!"

"Goodness gracious me, Mr. Hanson!" exclaimed the boarding-house keeper. "You don't mean it! For—what?"

"Well, ma'am, we won't say precisely for what, yet," replied Hanson. "But—I want him! I should have had him but for a little accident—I only missed him by inches, as you know. We shall get him! And in the meantime, Mrs. Grading, I want to examine his room and belongings."

Mrs. Grading drew back from her open door, but she gave Hanson a doubtful look.

"Well, seeing what your position is, Mr. Hanson, I suppose I've no right to say you nay!" she answered. "But it's not very pleasant for me! Mr. Bassett has always behaved himself under my roof, paid me regularly and conducted himself in all ways like a gentleman, and it seems to me a strange thing that you police should be after him. Of course, I know nothing—and I should like to know something! What position shall I be in if Mr. Bassett comes back and finds that I've allowed you to go into his room and turn his belongings over?"

"A perfectly correct and legal one, Mrs. Grading!" replied Hanson. "But Bassett won't come back! Very unfortunately, he got wind—at least, he drew an inference—of what was about to happen, and he'd just time to clear out. I wish he would come back—I want him, badly!"

"And—for what, Mr. Hanson?" inquired the landlady. "I think I ought to know!"

"Well, if you must know, I suspect him of the murder of Miss Gilkison!" replied Hanson. "That's what I shall charge him with, anyway, when I lay hands on him! Just that, Mrs. Grading—and there it is!"

The landlady turned pale and caught her breath.

"You don't mean it!" she exclaimed, staring

incredulously at the two men. "Him! And I always considered him such a gentle-mannered man!—the sort that wouldn't hurt a fly! Well—well—of course you've some grounds?"

"I shouldn't be here if I hadn't," said Hanson. "Well—show us his room, Mrs. Grading."

Mrs. Grading said no more. Turning to the stairs, she led Hanson and his man to a large bed-sitting-room, the windows of which looked out on the Castle. It was all very prim and proper in its tidiness, but Hanson's sharp glance, straying round the room, settled on the dressing-table, where lay a small japanned tin cash-box, the lid thrown back; beneath it, a drawer had been pulled open and remained open.

"Ran in to get his cash!" muttered Hanson. "So he's in funds! Well—we'll have a look round, Mrs. Grading, if you please."

The landlady took this as a hint to depart, and went away, and Turner closed the door on her. For a moment Hanson stood in the middle of the room, taking in the situation. Suddenly he walked over to a chest of drawers and began to pull out one drawer after another. They were all empty. Crossing to the dressing-table, he repeated the process. Except for a complete change of linen in one drawer, the dressing-table drawers were empty, too. He opened a wardrobe; save for an overcoat there was nothing there.

"Seems to me this man was meditating a flight,

Turner!" he said. "He's been packing! He must have meant—without notice to Mrs. Grading—to be off to-morrow or very soon."

Turner nodded and pointed to an alcove in which stood a small oblong trunk, covered over with an old-fashioned brown holland case; upon it stood two leather suit-cases. Hanson signed to him to lift the uppermost on the bed; Turner, removing it there, began to undo the straps.

"See what's in it," said Hanson. "If there are papers, put them aside."

There were no papers. All that the suit-case contained was linen; the second suit-case was filled with clothes.

"Put them away and get that trunk out," said Hanson. "That's more likely to hold something worth finding. Pull it into the middle of the floor and take off the cover."

Turner did as he was bidden—only to discover that the brown-holland cover was firmly stiched along the edges.

"Rip up the stitches!" commanded Hanson. "He's not taken all that trouble for nothing! That's it—run your knife along the seams! Turn the top back—Good God!"

Turner cried out, too—stepping back with a gesture of amazement. For the cover was off by that, and there within lay a black, brass-nail-studded box, around which, tightly knotted, was a length of green clothes-line, unmistakably iden-

tical with that which Hanson had seen around the neck of the murdered woman.

"We've hit it, Turner!" he muttered in a hushed voice. "That's the line that was stolen out of Mrs. Grading's yard, below this window! He stole it, of course. He used one length to cord this box and the other—not much doubt what he did with that. Well, get the rope off and—lift the lid!"

"Probably locked," suggested Turner, struggling with the knots. "If so, we'll have to get tools——"

"It'll not be locked, or he wouldn't have corded it like that," said Hanson. "Take your time with those knots!—I don't want to cut that cord for anything!"

Turner took his time—compulsorily; the knots were many and tight. But he worked them loose at last, and drew off the cord in one piece, and Hanson promptly coiled it up and pocketed it.

"Now—what's inside?" he said. "Turn up the lid!"

The lid, lifted, revealed many wrappings and folds of soft paper: beneath these were various objects, also much wrapped and folded, some in cotton wool, some in swathes of old linen, some in tissue paper.

"Silver!" muttered Hanson, unfolding the first he handled. "Solid silver candlestick! And what's this—solid silver salver!"

He turned to stare at similar objects which

Turner was unearthing. Suddenly an idea flashed across him.

"By George, Turner!" he exclaimed. "Why—why this is part of the stock stolen from Appleyard, the jeweller, last winter—that burglary, you remember, that we were never able to make head or tail of! A thousand to one it is!

"Looks like it!" grunted Turner, still busy. "You've the list of missing articles, Superintendent. Of course, Mr. Appleyard would know. He lives not so far away—shall I fetch him?"

"Empty the box first," said Hanson.

Turner went on, turning out more silver goods; then gold. Watches—rings—ornaments. These things came to an end: another layer of soft papers followed. And beneath that the searchers found a second store of loot of a different nature—miniatures set in gold frames, some in precious stones; objects of *vertu;* gold snuff-boxes——

"Lord Siddlescombe's, without a doubt!" muttered Hanson. "Well—well! Turner, lay 'em all out on the bed. And then call at Appleyard's and tell him to come here—and from him go up to the Fleece, ask for Mrs. Hatton, and bring her back with you—we'll have these things identified at once, if possible."

Turner presently went, and when he had gone Hanson followed him out and, locking the door of the room, put the key in his pocket and went downstairs to find Mrs. Grading.

CHAPTER XIX

TRAPPED

Hanson found Mrs. Grading hovering about the foot of the stairs, obviously more anxious and excited than when he had dismissed her from Bassett's room.

"I wish you'd tell me what all this comes to, Mr. Hanson!" she exclaimed. "It's most painful for me, with other lodgers in the house—though, to be sure, they're all out at church just now, and very fortunate it is that they are—but, as I say, painful to have police here in what's always been a most highly respectable——"

"It's one of those things that can't be helped, Mrs. Grading," broke in Hanson. "Disagreeable enough for me! But come into your parlour and I'll show you something that'll not only astonish you but prove to you that we know what we're doing! Look at this!" he went on, drawing the length of green clothes-line from his pocket. "Do you recognize that, ma'am? Of course you do!—that's the line you had stolen from your yard!—part of it, at any rate."

The landlady made a little moan of woebegone surprise.

"Oh dear, oh dear, Mr. Hanson!" she said. "Wherever did you find that?"

"Round his trunk, concealed by the holland cover," replied Hanson. "Your line!—but as I say, only a part of it—which is significant!"

"And it was a cord like that," continued Mrs. Grading in a horror-struck whisper, "that was—that was——"

"Found round Miss Gilkison's throat!" said Hanson. "So—draw your own conclusions, ma'am! But that's not all! This man—Bassett is not his real name—was evidently going to leave you. He'd got all his belongings packed. We've opened them—his suit-cases and the trunk. Inside the trunk, Mrs. Grading, are the proceeds of two burglaries that I know the history of—one committed here in the town, not so long ago; the other at a Buckinghamshire country house seven years since! So—that's the sort of boarder you've had, ma'am!—no blame to you, of course."

Mrs. Grading threw up her hands.

"I couldn't have believed it!" she said. "As quiet and well-behaved a man as ever I knew! Regular as clockwork in his payments and in his habits, too! I never had the slightest reason to complain of him. I considered him an unusually good-mannered person, Mr. Hanson. Well, you never know your company!"

"Talking of his habits," remarked Hanson, "can you tell me anything about his movements

last Tuesday evening? Just let your mind go back. Only—be sure of the date."

"Yes, I can remember last Tuesday evening, well enough," replied Mrs. Grading. "As a matter of fact, he always did the same thing every evening. He used to go out about eight o'clock, and always returned about half-past ten. I believe he used to go to one or other of the hotels or taverns, smoke his pipe, have a glass or two, talk to whoever he met there, and come home when they closed. But I do remember Tuesday evening in particular, because I was sitting in this very room, with the door open, and I called him to ask if he could explain something that I'd just read in the evening paper—he was a well-informed man, Mr. Hanson—and he came in and talked awhile before going up to his room."

"You didn't notice anything unusual about him that night?" inquired Hanson. "No sign of excitement or anything?"

"Nothing at all!" declared the landlady. "Quiet and composed as usual—he was always a very quiet man. Kept himself to himself a great deal, but polite and friendly if approached. I've never had a bigger surprise in my life than this, Mr. Hanson!—it's absolutely——"

A sharp knock at the front door brought Hanson to his feet.

"I'll go, Mrs. Grading," he said. "It'll be somebody I'm expecting. Sorry to put you to all

this trouble, but we'll be through with it before your other boarders come back from church."

He went to the door and found Appleyard, the jeweller, standing there, alert and curious.

"Turner given you any idea of what I wanted you here for?" asked Hanson, as he beckoned him into the house and led him towards the stairs.

"Well—just an idea," replied Appleyard. "Thinks you've found some of my stolen property!"

"Come upstairs!" said Hanson. He led the jeweller into Bassett's room, and turned back a sheet which he had laid over the first part of the valuables unearthed from the corded trunk. "There you are!" he added. "Can you identify anything there?"

Appleyard laughed quietly.

"Recognize the lot!" he answered. "That's all mine—every article!" He paused, looking inquisitively round the room. "Whose room is this?" he asked. "One of Mrs. Grading's boarders, of course—but which of 'em——"

"Bassett!" replied Hanson. "Tall, slender man——"

"I know Bassett!—well enough," said Appleyard. "You've got him, of course. No? Good lord! —I saw him, just about six o'clock!"

"You did!" cried Hanson. "Where, man?"

"Going into the Castle! I was coming up North Street, at the side—been out for a walk with my

youngsters. I saw Bassett cross from just below this house and go into the Castle Grounds—noticed him particularly, for he was walking very fast—almost running. I thought he must be taking a short cut through the grounds to Friarsgate Station. But—Bassett! Such a respectable sort of chap, to all appearance! And you think——"

Turner suddenly appeared, bringing Mrs. Hatton. Hanson lifted another sheet, silently motioning Mrs. Hatton to look. Mrs. Hatton looked—and stepped back with a sharp exclamation.

"Lord Siddlescombe's!" she cried. "Oh yes—I know them. So?—he's kept them all these years!"

"You're sure of what you say, Mrs. Hatton?—you can positively identify them?" asked Hanson. "Be certain—because I must wire to the police at Aylesbury and to Lord Siddlescombe as well!"

"Oh, I am certain!" declared Mrs. Hatton. "That's a miniature of his mother's that my lord prized most highly—he was more concerned about the loss of that than of anything. And that's a curio that hung on the wall of my lord's study—I've heard him say, more than once, that it was a Russian religious picture and—and—what's the word—unique! Oh yes, Mr. Hanson, I haven't the slightest hesitation in saying that all these things belong to Siddlescombe Abbey!—not the very slightest."

Hanson put his companions out of the room,

and after locking the door, placed the key in his pocket. Five minutes later, Mrs. Hatton and Appleyard went away up the street together, talking as if they had known each other all their lives, and Hanson, with Turner in his wake, made for the Castle. He wanted to know if Roberts had seen Bassett enter the grounds.

But neither Roberts nor his wife nor their two children, playing around the entrance, had seen Bassett. The fugitive had evidently slipped into the grounds when the caretaker's family sat at tea, and had immediately vanished into the ruins or the thick shrubberies. But—whence, after that? There was no answer to be got there, and Hanson went back to the police-station.

It was by that time eight o'clock of the evening, and Hanson plunged into what he intended to be a thorough night's work. He was convinced that Bassett was in the town, and he meant to have him before morning. One by one, the men he had already sent out came in, with nothing to report; Hanson bundled them all out again with forcible instructions not only to redouble their own efforts, but to spread the news all over the town and to press any civilian who cared to join in the hunt, into service. Then, Sunday night though it was, he got to work with telephone and telegraph; by nine o'clock every town and village in the neighbourhood, every railway station, every police-headquarters had been warned, every garage, posting-

stable for miles around notified that Bassett might turn up and apply for a car or a conveyance. And all that done, Hanson took Turner and a couple of trusty men, armed with lanterns and electric torches, and set out to search the Castle in every nook and corner. It was his opinion that Bassett, from having lived so long in close proximity to the old stronghold, knew every inch of it, and was hiding there until he found a favourable opportunity of getting clear away.

Minded, now that he was about it, to do the thing properly, Hanson took unusual precautions to make a thorough search of the Castle. The time for closing the gates and clearing the grounds had arrived when he and his men got down there; he saw to it that the grounds really were cleared and that men were posted at various points around the walls to prevent anybody from re-entering. And from thence until nearly midnight he conducted a painstaking inspection of the whole place, prying into every corner of the ruins, underground as well as above ground, searching the shrubberies, exploring the moat. The search yielded nothing; and at midnight, when his forces reassembled at the police-station from all parts of the town, not a single man had anything to report, Bassett appeared to have vanished into thin air.

"Somebody's sheltering him, Superintendent!" said Turner, walking homewards with Hanson to-

wards one o'clock in the morning. "He probably slipped across the Castle Grounds when he left Mrs. Grading's, got over the walls into the low part of the town, and took refuge with somebody there. It looked, now, as if when that foreigner chap alarmed him, he'd hurried to his lodgings to get ready money—there was the empty cash-box on his dressing-table, anyway. Well, if he'd money on him, there are plenty of folk down there below the Castle who'd take him in and hide him! Some of 'em down that way would harbour their own mother's murderer for a five-pound note!—they would!"

"And give him up for another, no doubt!" said Hanson, with a cynical laugh. "Well, better see to that in the morning, Turner. Give our men the tip to pass the word round that it'll be all the worse for anybody who's harbouring him. You can do a lot by gossip—let it be known that harbouring a suspected criminal is a very serious offence—it's sufficient to render anybody liable to be charged as an accessory, for whoever harbours a criminal, protects and assists and relieves him, and to assist, protect, and relieve is to become accessory—eh?"

"Too much jargon in that, sir," said Turner, smiling. "It'll be enough if I have the word passed round that whoever's harbouring Bassett'll catch it hot and strong—they'll understand that! It's plain English."

Hanson went to bed—and got up two hours earlier than usual. He hurried back to the police-station. There was no news. And as the morning passed on there was still no news: no news had come when the middle of the afternoon was reached. Towards evening two detectives arrived from Aylesbury; they were followed a little later by Lord Siddlescombe from London: Hanson had wired to him and to the Aylesbury police the previous evening. Lord Siddlescombe identified his stolen property as readily as Appleyard, the jeweller, had identified his; the detectives were interested in Bassett's escape. One of them remembered his escape from the Buckinghamshire police-station after his remand.

"Slippery chap!" he remarked, after listening to Hanson's story. "He got away smartly enough, then, and he seems to have done it again now! You think he's still in the town—I don't. I reckon he's a long way off by this time. Depends on how much ready money he had."

"Don't agree with you," said Hanson. "I've circulated an accurate description of him all over England, and he's the sort of man who'd easily be spotted."

"We did that, seven years ago," remarked the detective, with a dry laugh. "And—he's been under your nose."

"That's—seven years ago," retorted Hanson. "He's only been in this town a comparatively

short time. And I stick to it—he's in it now."

"Smoke him out, then," said the detective. "After all, you want him for murder. And your old town isn't as big as all that. Reckon you could do a house-to-house visitation here—comfortably."

"We'll get him," replied Hanson. "You needn't trouble yourselves. I only sent for you to identify him as the man who got away from you. I believe you actually had him locked up. He'll not get away from me if I once turn a key on him."

The detectives went away, and for the next two days loafed about Norlanstead, doing nothing easily. And during those two days Hanson did nothing—except wait. On the next, very late at night, he got his first bit of luck. Mother Gadgett was shown in to him, insisting on privacy.

"Well?" demanded Hanson. He didn't associate his visitor with the business most in his mind. "What do you want, Mrs. Gadgett?"

Mother Gadgett gave him a knowing look.

"Mr. Hanson," she said, in an oily whisper. "You want that man Bassett?"

Hanson started and stared.

"Do you know anything about him?" he asked quickly.

"Yes," replied Mother Gadgett, with more knowingness of glance. "I do, Mr. Hanson. Which he's in my house!"

"Your house!" exclaimed Hanson. "How long has he been there?"

"Maybe three-quarters of an hour," answered Mother Gadgett. "Of course, I'm all for the law, I am, Mr. Hanson—and I hope you'll bear my sentiments in mind. Yes, about three-quarters of an hour, Mr. Hanson. He came to me, starving—and I locked him up and came straight to you."

CHAPTER XX

UTTERLY BAULKED!

It was seldom that Hanson felt himself reduced to silence, but his visitor's effrontery and plausibility, curiously mixed together, seemed to tie his tongue; he twisted round in his chair and gazed at her as at a problem. And Mother Gadgett went on, in the same oily, wheedling voice.

"You see, Mr. Hanson, I'd heard of the hue-and-cry after Bassett," she said. "Who hasn't?—it's been all over the town, since Sunday night. Well, to-night, when, very fortunately, I was all alone in my house, there came a tap at my back door. I went and opened it—there he was, Bassett! And looking as if he was at his last extreme! He begged to come in—and when he'd got in, he pushed money into my hand—bank-notes! 'Mrs. Gadgett,' he says, hoarse-like, 'I'm done!—I've had no food since Sunday night, and I'm starving! Give me something to eat, and hide me somewhere till I can get away into the country, and if that money's not enough, you shall have more. Only—keep me secret and safe!' 'Put your money back in your pocket, Bassett,' says I, just like that, Mr. Hanson. 'I'll give you food and drink and make

you safe,' I says—for you see, Mr. Hanson, I'm a quick-witted woman, and I'd already made up my mind what to do with him. 'Come this way, sharp!' I says, 'and I'll put you where nobody could find you, however they looked!' And I took him upstairs to a certain room and showed him inside, and then I ran downstairs and got a few biscuits and a drop of spirits—only weak, Mr. Hanson!—and took 'em back to him. 'That'll stay your stomach awhile, Bassett,' I says, 'till I can cook you a meal. Now you stop there, quiet, and I'll lock you in, so as nobody can disturb you!' And he made no objection, I'll warrant you, Mr. Hanson!—he fell on those biscuits as if he was fair ravenous. So I locked him in, and went down, and locked up my house, back and front, and came off here, to you. And there he is, Mr. Hanson, as safe as if you had him in your lock-up, for there's bars in front of the window of that room he's in, and a stout lock on the door, and the key's—well, here it is—I'll hand it to you!"

Hanson was still staring, and it was with an effort that he found his tongue.

"Did he say where he'd been hiding?" he asked.

"Which he did not, Mr. Hanson!" replied Mother Gadgett. "I've repeated to you every word that passed between us. Of course, I've my own notions as to that point. There's a many queer places down our quarter of the town where a man could hide successfully for days and days, if he'd

food. But, of course, he hadn't—hunger drove him out."

"What made him come to you?" demanded Hanson.

Mother Gadgett smiled—a smile which would have puzzled a much more profound and expert student of human nature than Hanson could claim to be.

"Well, you know, Mr. Hanson, I'm well known to be soft-hearted!" she said, unctuously. "I've done a many kind-natured action in my time—I have indeed! Celebrated for 'em, if I may say so. But, of course, in a case of this sort, I cannot aid and abet a man as has broken the law so grievous! I'm a law-abiding person, Mr. Hanson."

"Glad to hear it, Mrs. Gadgett," said Hanson. Secretly, he was stamping his visitor as a damned plausible liar! But that was neither here nor there, just then. "Well, we'd better go down to your house and get him," he continued. "I'll take a couple of men——"

"And if you please, Mr. Hanson," interrupted Mother Gadgett, "you'll do it quiet! And—without bringing me into it. Of course, I'll let you in, but I should take it as a favour that you'll do the rest yourselves, me not being concerned, nor in evidence. I should wish him to think that he was tracked to my house, and that I'd no option—do you see, Mr. Hanson? Because, in case he was cleared of these charges, and he knew I'd been to

you—well it would lead to unpleasantness—he'd say I'd given him away!"

"All right, Mrs. Gadgett," agreed Hanson. "You go back to your house—we'll follow behind. As soon as you've let me in, make yourself scarce. I'll see to all the rest."

Five minutes later, Hanson, Turner, and a plain-clothes man followed Mother Gadgett through the deserted streets, never more than a few yards behind her well-fed figure. And as midnight struck from the town clocks, she let them into the silent house and pointed up the stair.

"First door you come to on the second landing!" she whispered. "Now you'll keep him out of my way, Mr. Hanson?"

Hanson nodded, and led his men up the stair, motioning them to tread softly. He turned the key in the door of the indicated room and walked swiftly in, the others at his heels. Bassett, sitting helplessly on the side of a bed, staring blankly at an empty plate and an empty glass on the dressing-table, turned and looked, and showed no sign of either surprise or fear.

"Now Bassett!" said Hanson. "We've run you to earth, you see! Come along, and make no bother!"

Just as Hanson had expected, his captive made none. He rose, wearily.

"I'm in no condition to give trouble," he said.

"I'm done! I was done when I came here—starving, worn out."

He looked from one to the other of the three men. "I expect you watched me come in?" he went on. "I might have known it. But—I had to."

"Come along!" said Hanson. "I'll see that you're properly fed, at once."

Bassett walked quietly down the stairs, between Turner and the plain-clothes man. He neither asked for Mother Gadgett nor glanced in the direction of the room in which she had bestowed herself. Nor did he speak much again until, half-an-hour later, when he had eaten and drunk at the police-station, in Hanson's own room, he turned on his captors with an understanding look.

"I know what you think!" he said. "And I suppose that since that foreigner came to you last Sunday night, you've been at Mrs. Grading's and made discoveries. You think I killed that woman, Miss Gilkison? You're wrong!—I never laid a finger on her! As I can prove—to the full!"

"Well for you, if you can, Bassett," replied Hanson. "This is informal—you can talk if you like—on the usual understanding. But there's other matters than that. We found two lots of stolen property in your trunk—one lot belonging to Appleyard, the jeweller, in this town; the other belonging to Lord Siddlescombe of Siddlescombe Abbey, where, under the name of Bruerley,

you were house-steward. What do you say to that?"

"It's useless to say anything about it except that you're right," replied Bassett. "Guilty enough!—both cases. That's nothing!—now it's come to it. But—you're clear off the track about the woman! I know nothing whatever about that affair—I didn't put an end to her!"

"Listen to this, Bassett," said Hanson. "Miss Gilkison recognized you as Bruerley, the man who escaped from custody in Buckinghamshire after being arrested for stealing Lord Siddlescombe's property. You were seen to meet Miss Gilkison at nine o'clock last Thursday night, near the Cordwainer's Arms, and to go with her up the side-path to the Castle. Miss Gilkison was strangled in the Castle Grounds that night by a length of green clothes-line. That very evening Mrs. Grading's green clothes-line had been stolen from her back-yard: you boarded at Mrs. Grading's, and had access to her yard. Round your trunk we found a portion of that line!—now what do you say to all that, Bassett?"

Bassett finished eating and drinking and pushed away his plate and his glass; the food and drink had revived him and brought some colour to his cheeks, and he faced Hanson with something like confidence.

"I'll admit that it looks uncommonly suspicious," he said. "But I can easily prove my in-

nocence of that affair—Miss Gilkison's murder. It's quite true that Miss Gilkison recognized me as Bruerley. She did! We met, accidentally, two or three days before her death. We couldn't talk much, then, and we made an appointment to meet on the Tuesday evening, near, as you've said, the Cordwainer's Arms, on her return from Selsborough. We did meet—as near as I can say, at nine o'clock—perhaps a minute or two after nine. We walked up the path, over the north side of the Castle hill, to the Park end of the terrace. I can tell you about all that was said. She told me she'd thought the matter over, and as it was, after all, an affair of years before, and no concern of hers, she'd decided to say no more about it, especially as she didn't know, and didn't want to know, the rights and wrongs of it. I thanked her, and left her there and then at the corner of the terrace where the steps go down to the old part of the town. And now I'll ask you a question: At what time that night was Miss Gilkison murdered, according to the doctors?"

"Ten o'clock!" replied Hanson. He was becoming suspicious of this talk—something was beginning to suggest that once more he was on the wrong track. "Ten," he repeated. "Or a little after ten."

"I was in the Black Boy Inn, in the old town, from a quarter-past nine until half-past ten that night," said Bassett quietly, "and I walked

straight from the Black Boy by the low road to Mrs. Grading's—she can tell you what time I got in there, for she was up and called me into her parlour to ask a question. And the landlord of the Black Boy can prove that I was in his bar-parlour from nine-fifteen to ten, and in his private sitting-room from ten to ten-thirty, when I left. You can go and ask him!"

"My business!" said Hanson. He was growing more and more conscious that he was going to be baulked—and up to an hour ago he had felt certain of Bassett's guilt. "That green clothes-line?" he asked, after a pause. "What have you to say to that?"

For the first time since his arrest, Bassett smiled—and Hanson didn't like the smile. It was the smile of a man who is confident, assured.

"Well, I did take—steal, if you like—Mrs. Grading's clothes-line, the green clothes-line!" he answered. "I took it from the yard when she was out; I wanted something to cord my trunk, before putting the trunk in its holland case. And I'm very thankful now that I did take it!"

"Why?" inquired Hanson.

"Because it's the very thing that will completely clear me!" answered Bassett, triumphantly. "Miss Gilkison was no doubt strangled with a length of stuff cut from *some* green clothes-line —yes! but it wasn't from Mrs. Grading's green clothes-line! I cut Mrs. Grading's green clothes-

line exactly in two—into two equal parts. One part I used to cord up the trunk—no doubt you've got that half? Very well!—you'll find the other half, intact, in the chimney of my bedroom at Mrs. Grading's. Get it!—put the two halves together, and you'll find they make the complete line as sold to Mrs. Grading! What do you say to that?''

For the moment Hanson said nothing. But he saw that once more he was done. If what Bassett said was true, the length of green clothes-line with which Miss Gilkison had been strangled—now, and ever since the crime, in his, Hanson's possession —could not possibly have been cut from Mrs. Grading's line. He was baulked again—utterly baulked!

''Well, you'll be detained, of course, Bassett,'' he said. ''There's not only this, but the Apple-yard affair, and there are police from Aylesbury in the town who are anxious to see you.''

''You'll see the Black Boy people?—and look for that other half of the clothes-line?'' pleaded Bassett. ''Murder?—come, I don't want to be charged with that!''

Hanson nodded, in silence, and when Bassett had been disposed of for the rest of the night, he turned to Turner.

''What do you think of that, Turner?'' he asked.

Turner looked lugubrious.

''Well, if you ask me, Superintendent,'' he said, dismally, ''it seems to be a case of starting all

over again! Of course, if you've got one-half of Mrs. Grading's clothes-line, and the other half's in that chimney——"

"We don't know the exact length of the clothes-line when it was intact," interrupted Hanson.

"I do!" replied Turner. "I got the length from Chilsworth. All those fancy clothes-lines were the same length. Eight yards. Twenty-four feet."

Hanson produced the length of line which had corded Bassett's trunk. Turner measured it. Four yards.

"Just half!" said Turner. "Well, as I say—if the other half is intact . . ."

Hanson slept that night at the police-station, and by eight o'clock next morning was down at the Black Boy Inn. The landlord corroborated Bassett's story in every detail: Bassett, he said, was there from nine-fifteen to ten-thirty on the previous Tuesday evening. Other customers could prove it as well as he himself. And there was nothing unusual in his manner when he came there.

Then Hanson went to Mrs. Grading's, and in the chimney of Bassett's bedroom sought for and quickly pulled out a length of green clothes-line. He measured it there and then. Four yards.

"That settles it!" he muttered. "It's not been Bassett, after all! Come to another blank wall! Got to go back again. Well, if you lose one fox, there are others about! And after all, we've solved the Appleyard affair!"

He went back to the police-station, his thoughts already busy with the problem of what to do next. And he had scarcely reached the door when a boy came running after him and caught him on the steps.

"Mr. Hanson, sir, can you come round to our place—Mr. Chilsworth's?" he said. "Mr. Chilsworth wants to see you, sir—he said I was to tell you he's got the cablegram from Canada!"

CHAPTER XXI

TRACED!

Hanson turned on his heel and went straight to Chilsworth's shop. The shutters were just being taken down there, and the half-asleep assistants were moving slowly about their duties. But Chilsworth, all alive, came bustling forward, and beckoned the superintendent into his private office, where, from amidst a pile of correspondence, he picked out a flimsy sheet of paper and waved it triumphantly.

"Got it, Hanson!" he exclaimed. "Came with the letters! Delivered here at our post-office early this morning. There you are—and I daresay you'll not be surprised when you read it!"

He threw the cablegram on the desk, and Hanson bent over it.

Only one of those green clothes-lines sold by me was to young Mrs. Marris of Swarthington.

Hanson read this twice, and looked up: Chilsworth was watching him, with a knowing smile.

"Well?" he said. "How's that strike you?"

"I'm not surprised," replied Hanson. "I only wish I'd known it before—that you, or some of

your present assistants, had been able to supply the information before. It would have saved me a heap of trouble!"

"Well, we didn't know!" said Chilsworth. "Five of 'em we could and did account for, but the sixth—" he paused, tapping the cablegram with his finger—"the sixth only this chap knew about! Now he's told—and you know! Young Mrs. Marris, of Swarthington! So—it comes back to that, Hanson! About where you started out, what?"

"Yes," said Hanson. "About where we started out." He stood for a moment, thinking of the various by-ways into which he had been drawn out of the straight line. Then he reached for the cablegram. "I'll take that," he said. "It seems pretty good proof."

"Proof?—I should say so!" exclaimed Chilsworth. "But I say—all this hue and cry after that man Bassett?—what about it?"

"Come to nothing—as regards the murder," replied Hanson. "Got him on two other charges, though. No, I'm satisfied, on good evidence, that he'd nothing to do with the murder."

"Well," observed Chilsworth, with a significant glance at the cablegram, which Hanson was putting away in his pocket-book, "I suppose that's given you an idea, eh? You know where that clothes-line went! And I reckon you'll trace it, eh?"

"Yes!" said Hanson. "Oh yes! It's got to be traced. Much obliged to you, Chilsworth, for the trouble you've taken."

"Nothing—nothing!" protested Chilsworth. "Duty, you know, duty!"

Hanson went away, conscious that his duty that day was going to be of a disagreeable nature. He sat down to his breakfast at the police-station reflecting on the situation which had arisen through the receipt of the cablegram from Canada. So the sixth green clothes-line had been disposed of to Mrs. Marris, had it? Well, its subsequent history had got to be traced. He possessed the length which had been carefully taken from the dead woman's neck, and the piece which had been discovered thrown aside in the Castle ruins; the remaining portion he would have to look for at Marris's farm, or at any rate, to ask information about of Mrs. Marris. But even then the question would arise—who made use of the line for the purpose of the murder? Was it Mrs. Marris herself?—or her brother, Matthew Clay?—or was it their mother, Sabina Clay?—or was it a conspired action amongst all these? He was still without further information about Sabina's movements in Norlanstead after a certain time on the night of the murder; still ignorant of what Mrs. Marris and her brother did after they were seen going into the Castle Grounds. Somehow, he would have to

get evidence on those points. But where? How?

While he ate and drank, a constable came in to say that Mr. Holmes, farmer, of Copsley, wanted to see him. Hanson bade him show Mr. Holmes in—Holmes, entering, showed signs of news in his face.

"You haven't got that man of mine, Mr. Hanson?" he asked. "Young Clay?"

"I? No!" replied Hanson. "Why?"

Holmes sat down, with a glance of curiosity at the unfamiliar surroundings.

"Why," he said, explainingly. "I thought you might have. Thought, d'ye see, he'd been here in town Sunday night, and you'd seen him and concluded to lock him up. Because he's off!"

"Off?" exclaimed Hanson. "Where?"

"Nay, if I knew where, I shouldn't be here!" retorted Holmes. "I came in, special, to see if you knew anything about him. He went out after you'd been at my place on Sunday and he's never been back! There it is!"

"I know nothing of him," said Hanson.

"Well, you've evidently given him a fright—whatever you said to him," remarked Holmes. "I tell you he went off as soon as he'd finished his dinner, Sunday—that was just after you went away in your car—and he's never been heard of since in our parts. Taken his departure—that's about it."

"Would he have money on him?" inquired Hanson.

Holmes wagged his head—whether assertingly or not Hanson could not tell.

"Well," he replied, "one of my other men, that slept in the same room with Clay, says that Clay went up there, after Sunday dinner, while he was in the room, and took something out of his box, he thinks it was money. He'd have money—some fair amount, no doubt—he was a saving chap."

"And that was Sunday?" said Hanson. "Um! He's got a fair start! You don't think he'd go home—to Swarthington?"

"I should think," replied Holmes, with a dry smile, "I should think that would be about the last place he would go to, after you'd been at him! No, sir—you'll not find him there!"

"You've no idea where he would go?" asked Hanson.

"Well, he might try Kingsport," said Holmes. "Some of these country lads go there when they're tired of holding a plough! Kingsport, very like."

"What good would he be as a sailor?" said Hanson. "They want sailors at Kingsport!"

"Dock labourers, too," retorted Holmes. "I was thinking of dock labourers. I've had men go there in that capacity. Anyway, that's all I could suggest. Awkward for me that he's cut and run just now! I'm short of labour. But you must ha' frightened him, Sunday, Mr. Hanson!"

"I told you I could get nothing out of him!" said Hanson. "Nothing!"

"Very like!" assented Holmes. "But you put something into him!"

He went away, and Hanson, after consultation with Turner, determined on a bold stroke. Chartering a closed car and taking Turner, Turner's wife, and a plain-clothes man, Simpson, who had accompanied him and Turner to Mother Gadgett's the previous midnight, he drove off to Swarthington, and at eleven o'clock drew up at the gate of Marris's farm. He remembered his first visit there, and how he had been unceremoniously dismissed; this time, he said to himself, as he and Turner walked to the side door, he would take his own time about his comings and goings.

The side door of the house, opening on the farmyard, stood wide open, and through it Hanson and his companion had a full view of the house-place. Anne Marris was there alone, busied, at a side-table, in making up butter. Through another door, opening into a stone-paved kitchen, they had a vision of a man, evidently one of Marris's labourers, steadily turning the handle of an old-fashioned barrel-churn; they heard the steady chunk-chunk-chunk-chunk of the butter gathering consistency as the churn revolved. And Anne Marris was singing, and in the window above the table at which she worked, a canary in its cage was lustily piping.

"Peaceful!" muttered Hanson to Turner as they reached the door. "Well—there's nothing else for it, Turner—we've got to know!"

At the sound of his loud knock on the open door, Anne Marris turned sharply. Hanson expected to see her grow pale at sight of him; instead she flushed hotly. She came forward slowly, in silence.

"Good morning, Mrs. Marris," said Hanson. "Is Mr. Marris at home?"

"He isn't!" replied Anne. "He's away—he's gone to a farm sale, the other side of Withington, and he'll not be back till night. Is it——"

"I think you'll do as well, Mrs. Marris," said Hanson, as she paused. "May we come in?" He walked into the house-place, motioning Turner to follow him, without waiting for her permission. "In fact," he continued in a low voice, when they were inside, "it's you, Mrs. Marris, that I really want to see. I want to ask you some questions."

Anne Marris retreated to the table at which she had been making up butter, and leaning against it, faced Hanson with a look of determined resolution.

"If it's about what you came about before," she said, doggedly, "I'm not going to answer any questions! Marris, he said I was to say nothing, if you ever came again. And I won't!"

"Just let me say a word or two, Mrs. Marris,"

replied Hanson. "It's an unwise attitude to adopt! —it's only making things much worse for yourself. Now, I may as well tell you something—several things in fact. I've proof that you and your brother, Matthew, were in and about the Castle Grounds at a late hour last Tuesday night, the night, as you're aware, when Miss Gilkison was murdered. Now, will you tell me what you were doing there?"

"I shall tell nothing!" she answered. "It's no business——"

"You'll find it's my business, Mrs. Marris!" said Hanson, sternly. "I know you were there with your brother. And now your brother has run away from his employment at Mr. Holmes's——"

He paused, seeing her start. That, he saw, was news to her. And it startled her into asking a question.

"Run away? Our Matthew? When?"

"He's never been seen there since Sunday," replied Hanson. "He left after I'd been to see him. Like you, he wouldn't answer a question—it would have been better for him if he had. It would be better for you if you would."

Anne Marris shook her head. Her face was growing harder and more resolute. But Hanson persevered.

"If you had nothing to do with this affair, what harm can it do you to tell me what you and your

brother were doing in the Castle Grounds?" he said persuasively. "It would clear up a good deal——"

"I've told you, and I tell you again, I'm not going to answer a single question!" Anne suddenly broke out. "You've no right to come here when Marris is away and try to force me——"

The chunk-chunk of the barrel-churn suddenly stopped, and the man who had been turning it strode into the house-place: a big, elderly, grey-haired man, who glared threateningly at Hanson and his companion.

"Here, now then, none o' that," he growled. "I'm not going to have my missis forced to talk against her will when my master's away! You be off out o' this, d'ye hear, or I'll——"

"We're police-officers, my man!" said Hanson. "You'd better——"

"I care naught if you're police-officers nor any other sort o' officers!" retorted the man defiantly. "Mr. Marris, he's away, and you've no right to come interfering with his wife! Missis!" he broke off, suddenly turning to Anne, "shall I fetch some men in—we'll soon have these fellows out!"

"No, Haines!" said Anne. "Don't interfere! —you mean well, but they're police! You can't throw them out—they've the law on their side. Leave them alone, Haines, and go on with the churning!" She turned, defiantly, to her butter-making, throwing a backward glance at Hanson.

"You can stand there as long as ever you like!" she said. "It's no good!—I shan't answer a question!"

"Very well, Mrs. Marris!" replied Hanson. "Then in that case, being, as you've reminded this man of yours, police-officers, we're going to do our duty. We're going to search these premises. And to begin with, we'll make sure that we're not interfered with. Call Simpson in, Turner! Simpson!" he went on when the plain-clothes man came hurrying in. "Keep your eye on this man here at the churn!—see that he doesn't leave that kitchen. Come this way, Turner!"

In approaching the house on the occasion of his first visit, Hanson had made a careful inspection of its geography. He had noticed at the side, in the rear of the front garden and orchard, a small paddock fitted with posts set in sockets, which, he saw at once, was used as a drying-ground on washing days. At the corner of this paddock, and communicating with the kitchen wing of the house, was a building evidently used as a wash-house—it opened, indeed, out of the kitchen in which Haines was churning. And to this Hanson led Turner, with a word of explanation as they got inside.

"You see what this is?" he said, closing the door on his companion and himself. "The wash-house; the drying-ground is outside. Here's where they'll keep clothes-lines, in the ordinary way. Now we've got to search——"

He paused—Turner was tapping his arm and pointing.

There, right before them, hung in a coil on a hook in the white-washed wall was a length of slender green cord!

CHAPTER XXII

THE OPEN WINDOW

Beyond a sharp, quickly smothered exclamation, Hanson made no remark on seeing the object to which Turner was pointing. He stepped forward quickly and took the cord down from its hook; the next moment he had let it run through his fingers to its full length, glancing questioningly at his companion.

"That's the rest of it!" muttered Turner. "That'll just about fit in with the pieces we have already. If we had them here——"

Hanson was beginning to coil up the cord again.

"The odd thing," he muttered, giving Turner a puzzled look, "the odd thing is that no attempt's been made to hide this piece! Now if I'd only had sense to search this place at first? However—there's no doubt this is the line that Chilsworth's assistant sold to—her!" He nodded in the direction of the house-place where they had left Anne Marris, busied with her butter-making. "Come back, Turner," he continued. "We'll hear what she has to say."

Opening the door into the kitchen, where Haines had resumed his ready turning of the barrel-churn, the two men went back into the house-place.

Anne ostentatiously kept her back to them. But Hanson walked round to the other side of the table at which she stood.

"Do you know anything about this, Mrs. Marris?" he asked, holding up the coil of cord. "Come, now!"

He was watching her keenly, and he saw that for the first time since their entrance to the house, she was taken aback. Her faced flushed, she started a little, and she put down her butter-making implements.

"It's—it's only a clothes-line, a fancy sort, that I bought, a while ago," she answered. "What of it?"

"You bought it at Chilsworth's shop, didn't you?" suggested Hanson.

"I did—yes! What may you want with it, I'd like to know," she said. "I'd forgotten all about it!—it's never been used. I hung it up in the wash-house, when I brought it home—and there it's been ever since."

"Shortened!" said Hanson. He let the cord run through his fingers. "There's only about a half of it here, Mrs. Marris! I know what the length should be. Eight yards! Where's the rest?"

"I know nothing about it!" she declared. "I've told you! I hung it up on a hook, in the corner of the wash-house, when I brought it back one day from market, and I've never touched it since!"

"There's a piece missing from it," said Hanson. "I may as well tell you, that piece, without doubt, was used to strangle Miss Gilkison! Come, now, Mrs. Marris, hadn't you better reconsider matters and answer my questions? If you'd only tell me what you and your brother——"

He paused suddenly. The steady chunk-chunk-chunk-chunk of the churn in the kitchen had stopped again, and Haines was standing in the open doorway. And Hanson saw that Haines was staring, and staring hard, at the coil of green rope. "I've said I shall say nothing!" replied Anne. "I'll answer no questions! If Marris was here——"

Haines stepped forward, threateningly.

"It's what I've said, that!" he growled. "You've no right, police or no, to come badgering a woman, especially one that's little more than a young lass, when her master's not by to stand up for her! I'd be ashamed of myself to worry a poor girl in that way! I wonder you call yourselves men!"

"Mind your own business, my man!" said Hanson. He turned once more to Anne. "Will you talk to me in private, Mrs. Marris?" he said. "There's nothing to be afraid of if you've a proper explanation of your movements that night —be advised, now!"

"No!" said Anne. "I shall say nothing! You

can't make me—and I won't! Marris, he said at the beginning to say nothing. You'll get naught out of me!"

Hanson folded up the green cord and putting it in his pocket, turned to Turner.

"Call your wife in here!" he said. "Now, Mrs. Marris!" he went on as Turner stepped outside the door. "I'm sorry, but you'll have to come with us! You'll want to change your dress, and as you can't be let out of observation now, here's Mrs. Turner who will accompany you. We'll wait here till you're ready."

Anne, who had picked up her butter-making implements again, turned on Hanson with a stare of what he recognized—somewhat uncomfortably—to be genuine amazement. From him she turned to stare at Mrs. Turner, a tall, masculine-looking woman who was not unfamilar with such situations, from Mrs. Turner she stared, harder than ever, at Hanson again. The colour flamed up in her cheeks; her lips parted.

"Are—you taking me up?" she exclaimed. "Me? Whatever for?"

For the moment Hanson faltered. Something in the girl's accents warned him that once more he might be on a wrong track. But his mind worked quickly. Anne Marris's jealousy of this dead woman—her own and her mother's threats—the fact that, as Weasel Dick had proved, she had overheard the appointment made between her

husband and Miss Gilkison at the Castle Terrace —the fact that she and her brother had been seen there and going into the Castle Grounds—and now the green cord . . . no, it had, at any rate, to be looked into.

"You'll hear what the definite charge is all in good time, Mrs. Marris," he answered. "But you're in custody now, and you mustn't keep us waiting. Mrs. Turner will go with you while you change your clothes—go now, please."

But Anne stood where she was. Her attitude was still incredulous, amazed.

"You're going to take me to Norlanstead?" she said. "Now?"

"Just now!" answered Hanson. "Come—go with Mrs. Turner and get ready."

Anne threw the butter-making implements on the table.

"Get ready nothing!" she exclaimed. "If I'm going, I'll go as I am!—I shan't change a stitch—so there!"

"Be sensible!" urged Hanson. "Come——"

"It's you that needs sense!" she retorted, with a flash of her eyes. "And you'll find that out, too! You needn't keep that woman standing there!—I'll go with you, quiet enough. It'll not be for long. Are you going to walk me through the village?"

"There's a car outside," said Hanson. He was getting more and more uncertain and doubtful.

But he was going through with it now. "Take her down to it," he muttered to Turner. "We've waited here long enough."

"There's no need!" said Anne. She marched through the door, laughing scornfully. "I'm going —you've spoiled my butter-making, though!"

She walked steadily down the path towards the gate, Mrs. Turner and the two men close behind. Hanson, bringing up the rear, felt a sudden grip on his arm, and turning saw Haines. And Haines's expression had changed; from being aggressive and even truculent he had become frightened and pleading.

"Master!" he said, tremulously. "Don't take her! Let her bide, master—till Marris comes home, at all events! A young lass like that! Don't, master! You're making a mistake—a sad mistake, master!"

Hanson stopped, staring at him.

"How do you know I'm making a mistake?" he demanded sharply. "Say!"

Haines pointed to Hanson's side pocket. A bit of the green cord protruded.

"I saw you show her that, master!" he said. "It's—it's along of that—and its like being found round that dead woman's neck—that you're taking her! But I say—a mistake, master, a mistake! I—I could say something about that clothes-line—I could!"

"Then why the devil don't you say it, and be

done with it?" exclaimed Hanson, whose nerves were beginning to get on edge. "If you know something, say it!"

But Haines shook his head.

"I cannot and will not, master, till Marris comes home!" he answered. "Let her bide, master, till Marris is home again!"

Hanson remained silently staring at this strange advocate for a minute or two.

"Look here, my man!" he said suddenly. "You say you could say something about this green clothes-line I have in my pocket?"

"I could, master, I could!"

"Out with it, then! Now's the time!"

"No, master, I will not! Not till I've seen Marris!"

Hanson turned away. He glanced at the car, waiting at the gate. Anne Marris and Mrs. Turner were already inside; Turner had joined them; Simpson had got on the outside seat by the driver. And across the road, Sanders, standing in the open doorway of the inn, was watching. Hanson hesitated.

"Look here, Haines!" he said. "Do you know where Marris is?"

"Yes, master—gone to an auction the other side of Withington."

"Can you get at him?"

"It's seven miles, master—but I can borrow a horse and ride there."

"Go off there at once, Haines. Tell him I've taken his wife to Norlanstead, and that he's to come there immediately. And you needn't bother yourself about her—I shall do nothing till Marris comes. But he must come! Get your horse and go!"

He walked quickly down to the car, and before entering it told the driver to stop at Skelton's cottage. Once inside and moving he turned to his prisoner.

"I've sent Haines for your husband, Mrs. Marris," he said. "I've asked Mr. Marris to come to Norlanstead at once."

Anne looked at him with something very like contempt.

"It's a good job for you lot that Marris wasn't at home!" she said with a sneering laugh. "Marris!—he cares naught for nobody! And he keeps his gun loaded and ready to hand! If he'd been at home, some of you would ha' known about it! Sent for him, eh?—he'll pay no attention to messages from you! If he's minded to come, he'll come; if he isn't, he won't. All the devils in hell couldn't fetch Marris!"

"And I shall send Skelton to tell your mother of what has occurred," continued Hanson, taking no notice of his prisoner's taunts. "She, too, had better come into town."

Anne showed equal scorn.

"My mother!" she sneered. "D'you suppose my mother's naught better to do than to trail

into Norlanstead because you're dragging me there? I reckon she'll send Skelton off with a flea in his ear, if that's all he's got to tell her!''

On second thoughts, Hanson determined to see Sabina Clay personally, and having given whispered instructions to Turner about the disposal and comfort of Mrs. Marris, he left the car on arriving at Skelton's cottage, and bade the driver, after depositing his passenger at Norlanstead police-station, return later to Swarthington for himself: it might be, he thought, that he could get some news of Matthew from his mother, and anyway, she must be informed of what had befallen her daughter. And having told Skelton of what he had just done, he bade him lead the way to Sabina's cottage. Going thither by various byways behind the village, he told Skelton of his recent conversation with Haines.

''What do you suppose he meant, Skelton?'' he asked. ''Said he could say something about that cord! Now what is it likely he could say?''

Skelton considered this question in silence for a time.

''He's a very decent man, Haines, Superintendent,'' he answered at last. ''I've known Thomas Haines ever since I was a lad. If Thomas says he knows something, he does know something!''

''Why can't he speak, then?'' said Hanson.

''He said, didn't he, that he must see Marris first. Haines—he's worked for Marris a long time

—twenty years. And of course, all Marris's folks, men and women, are frightened to death of offending him. Marris—he's a tyrant. Always has been!"

"It looks to me as if Haines implied that Marris knew something," said Hanson. "Perhaps Marris does. We've never cleared up yet what Marris was doing between the time, 9.30, when he fetched his car out of the garage, and the time, after midnight, when he got home. He couldn't be driving about the country at that hour!"

"I don't know," said Skelton. "From what I've seen myself, and from what I've heard from policemen whose beats join mine, Marris is a nightbird! He's out at night a great deal."

"Well, that needs clearing up," remarked Hanson. "We'll have to get some information about it, somehow."

"There's a deal wants clearing up," said Skelton. "This Sabina Clay—you haven't cleared up all her doings that night, I think. That's her cottage," he added, suddenly, pointing to a chimney that protruded from amongst orchard trees at the end of the narrow lane they were traverting. "Lonely place it is!"

"She's evidently in," said Hanson. "The chimney's smoking."

A moment later they had no doubt that Sabina was at home. Her voice, loud and strident, came to their ears through the wide-open window.

"What's the good o' emigrating or going to foreign parts?" Sabina was saying. "They can fetch you from them places same as they can fetch you here! Why don't you go to Hanson, bold as brass, and tell him you're there and ask what he wants? When all's said and done, they can't prove anything against you and our Anne! And there's no call for you to tell 'em what you know—they'll never find it out, nohow, never!—how can they? Nobody can find it out, now!—no, not if they get all the police in England and all the detectives in the world. Hanson?—he's no more brains than a chicken——"

Hanson looked round at Skelton and smiled. Then he bent near to him and whispered.

"That's her son she's talking to!" he said. "Listen!"

CHAPTER XXIII

SILENCE

There was a brief silence after Sabina's unflattering reference to the principal listener. Then young Matt spoke.

"I can see naught for it but going!" he said, sullenly. "Them police chaps, they'll do naught but worry me if I stop in this country. Hanson, he was at our place Sunday, and I could see he'll be at me again. I reckon it'll be far better for me to draw my money out of the bank and be off to Liverpool and go to America or Canada or somewhere!"

"Tell you they'd fetch you back!" protested Sabina. "I've heard o' people going off to them places before and the police had 'em back in no time!—some of 'em were never allowed to set their feet down in either Canada or America. There's no use in running away, my lad—neither for you nor our Anne! Bide where you are and say naught!"

"No!" growled young Matt. "I know what them police chaps is! They'll be at me and at me till they force it out of me. I shall emigrate!"

Hanson hesitated no longer. With a sign to

Skelton to follow him, he pushed open the door, already ajar, and walked into the cottage.

"No emigration, my lad—just yet!" he said. "Come, now, I've heard what you were saying. What is it that you think'll be forced out of you? Be sensible and make a clean breast of it!"

But Sabina stepped in—literally. With a snarl of anger she forced herself in between her son and the unwanted visitors.

"You hold your tongue, Matthew!" she snapped. "And you—what do you mean by forcing yourself in my house? You mind what you're after, Hanson!—there's law for me as well as for anybody, and it's not in the law for you to walk into my house without permission. You get out—or I'll put you out! D'ye hear that, now?"

She made a sudden move towards a gun that hung on hooks above the low mantelpiece; quicker in movement than herself young Matt sprang between it and her, pushing her back.

"None o' that, mother!" he exclaimed. "Steady, now!—we want no trouble of that sort—plenty as it is. I told you they'd be at me again!"

"That's your own fault, Clay," said Hanson. "You know something—why don't you tell it? I gave you the chance on Sunday, and you've got it again now! Why not get rid of it?"

"Tell him naught!" shouted Sabina. "They can't make you! They can't torment and torture poor folks as they did in the good old days! You

keep your tongue quiet, Matthew, and let 'em do their worst. They know naught, and they'll learn naught if you keep your mouth closed."

"I'm not going to say aught," growled Matthew. He glanced sullenly at Hanson. "You'll get naught out o' me!" he declared. "I told you, Sunday, I wouldn't speak, and I shan't!"

"Then you'll have to come with me to Norlanstead!" said Hanson. "And I may as well tell you and your mother that your sister, Mrs. Marris, is there already! Now, don't make any fuss, Clay—you've got to go!"

Sabina, who with many muttered growlings had retreated to the fireside and picked up a broom, set it down again with a bang, and turned on Hanson with a stare of astonishment.

"Do you mean to tell me that you've been and arrested my daughter—Mrs. Geoffrey Marris?" she cried. "Taken her to the lock-up?"

"Mrs. Marris has been arrested and taken to the police-station at Norlanstead," replied Hanson. "She's there now!"

Sabina suddenly began taking off her apron and turning down the sleeves of her gown.

"Well, of all the——" she muttered. She turned sharply on Hanson again. "Where was Marris—to let you do that?" she demanded.

"Marris is away——" began Hanson.

"I'll warrant he is!" she interrupted. "He'd ha' had you fellows out o' the house if he'd been

at home. But you'll learn something, for all your cocksureness, Hanson! Are you going to take that lad?"

"I am, and just now," replied Hanson. "As he won't tell me anything, he shall have a chance of telling the magistrates!"

"Then I'm going, too!" exclaimed Sabina. "We'll see about our rights! I'm none without money, and I'll have the best lawyer in Norlanstead. We're not going to be down-trodden by you police fellows. You wait till I get my bonnet and shawl on; I'm not going to bide here while my lad and lass are locked up, not me!"

"No objection," said Hanson. "I can give you a ride. And you're welcome to employ all the solicitors in Norlanstead if you like—they'll have every facility to see their clients!"

Sabina hurried into her shawl and bonnet, muttering. She went to an old bureau in a corner of the room: Hanson heard the turning of a key and then the clinking of money.

"A nice job!" snapped Sabina, turning round with an old purse in her hand. "To have to waste one's money on these lawyers all for the likes of you, Hanson! This lad and his sister have naught to do with the murder of that woman."

"They know something about it, anyway!" retorted Hanson. He was still puzzled by the demeanour of mother, son, and daughter, but he was resolved on going through with things. "Come on

now, Clay—give us no trouble and it'll be all the better for you."

"I shall give no trouble," replied Matthew, surlily. "But you've gotten your plough in the wrong furrow, mister, all the same. I never laid a hand on that woman, nor did our Anne, neither!"

It was the first direct admission he had made, and Hanson realized its importance. But he made no reply, and presently he and Skelton escorted Matthew down the lane to the highroad where the car, returned from Norlanstead, awaited them. The four strangely assorted passengers set off on the journey which Mrs. Marris had already accomplished.

Sabina sat at her son's side, grimly silent, until the car pulled up at a side-entrance to the police-station. Then she suddenly spoke, glaring at the superintendent.

"I shouldn't wonder but what you're a fair man, when all's said and done, Hanson," she exclaimed. "And if it is so, tell me who's the best lawyer fellow to go and see—a smart 'un?"

"Try Mr. Cordukes, round the corner," said Hanson. "He's the cleverest solicitor in the town—for your purpose!"

Sabina nodded, and getting out of the car, turned to her son.

"You keep your mouth shut, Matthew!" she said imperatively. "And if you see our Anne in

there, tell her to keep hers shut, too! Wait till I've seen this here Cordukes!"

She vanished round the corner, and Hanson saw nothing and heard nothing of her for an hour. Then Cordukes, a middle-aged man with a vast reputation in criminal matters, came to him.

"Sabina Clay has been to me about her son and daughter, Hanson," he said as he sat down by the superintendent's desk. "You have them both in custody, eh?"

"Both!" replied Hanson.

"What have you charged them with?"

"So far, with nothing! I'm considering—and consulting. I suppose I shall charge them with the murder of Miss Gilkison. It's here, Cordukes! —if they didn't murder her, they know who did!"

Cordukes considered matters during a moment's silence.

"Between ourselves, informally," he said presently, "what's your evidence against them?"

Hanson replied to him, briefly, running over the various points that told against his prisoners.

"Pretty strong, eh?" he concluded. "Quite enough to justify me in what I've done! Anyhow, I shall charge them, and I shall bring them up before the magistrates to-morrow morning."

"That'll only be formal, of course," said Cordukes. "You'll just offer evidence of arrest and apply for an immediate adjournment—remanded in custody, eh?"

"That's it," agreed Hanson. "I shall ask for a week's remand."

"Well," said Cordukes. "Can I see them—both? Together I think. And alone?"

"You can!" replied Hanson. "You can have every facility you ask for. Talk straight to 'em!"

He waited in his office for over an hour—till Cordukes came back. Cordukes re-entered and sat down with something like a sigh. He looked puzzled.

"Well?" said Hanson.

"Strange couple!" remarked Cordukes. He rubbed his chin, and stared meditatively at his companion. "Of course," he continued, "this—between you and me—is—just between you and me!"

"Oh, of course!" agreed Hanson. "Quite informal!"

"I don't think either of those two, or the two in conjunction, actually murdered that woman," continued Cordukes, "but I think they know something about it."

"Said so, all along, haven't I?" muttered Hanson. "Know who did, in my opinion!"

"I wouldn't go as far as that! I think they may have a strong idea—not a certainty—who did."

"Why the devil don't they speak, then? What's the good?"

"The job is—to get these country people to speak," said Cordukes. "I've had a big experience

of them in criminal practice. If they get ideas into their heads, you can't get them to speak. These two—brother and sister—have some idea in their heads. They won't speak!''

''In short, you've got nothing out of them—not even on their own behalf!'' said Hanson. ''Won't even help themselves, eh?''

''I wouldn't go so far as to say that. They're not fools—either of them. They know they've time before them. You know how slow-thinking country people are. All I can say is—they swear they're not guilty of Miss Gilkison's murder, and they'll say no more. But—they know something!''

''The mother?'' suggested Hanson.

''Well, I think she knows something, or guesses something. She's a cute old devil, anyway! And, from my previous knowledge of her, a thoroughly bad 'un! But straight in some ways—money matters, for instance. This is a queer case, Hanson! Now what about this young woman's husband?''

''I sent to tell him,'' replied Hanson. ''I expect he'll come here.''

''I've heard all the talk about him and Miss Gilkison,'' remarked Cordukes. ''I suppose all this sprang out of that?''

''If village gossip—and ascertained fact—is correct, yes!'' replied Hanson. ''It is fact that young Mrs. Marris, and her mother, both threatened violence to Miss Gilkison—the mother especially. Threatened her life, in fact!''

"Why haven't you gone for the mother?"

"I've no dependable evidence against the old harridan! I wish I had! But I haven't—not the sort of evidence I have against her daughter and son, anyway. I might get some—yet. She was in town—but where, at the time of the murder, I don't know."

"What's your own theory, then, about the brother and sister?" asked Cordukes.

"Well, that the sister conspired with her brother to get rid of this woman, because of her supposed affair with Marris! It's not an unreasonable one. And they were there!—in those grounds. And the piece of cord with which Miss Gilkison was strangled came off Mrs. Marris's green clothesline. That's certain!"

Cordukes rose, looking still puzzled.

"Well, there it is!" he said. "Of course, I'll appear for them when you bring them up to-morrow morning, and if they want me in the meantime, they know they can send for me. But so far all I've got out of them is—what I've told you. Obstinate!—that's what they are. Still, there's something behind their obstinacy, and what it is I can't make out."

"They may think better of things by to-morrow morning!" said Hanson.

Cordukes shook his head and went away. When he had gone, Haines was shown in. Haines showed signs of haste.

"Well?" demanded Hanson. "See your master?"

"I've seen him!" replied Haines. "I caught him at that sale. I told him you'd taken the young missis to the lock-up!"

"What did he say?" Then, seeing the man hesitate, he added, "Speak out!"

"Well, master, if you must know, he said you were a damned fool!" replied Haines. "Them were his words!"

"Never mind! Is he coming here?"

"He said naught as to that. All he did say was to tell me, sharp-like, to go home and get on with the churning. But I didn't—I rode here to tell you. I do not know, master, if he's coming or not!"

"Of course, he'll come!" said Hanson.

But Marris did not come. Hanson neither saw nor heard of him that afternoon; he had not come by a late hour at night, nor when his wife and her brother were put in the dock next morning.

CHAPTER XXIV

FROM THE DOCK

Hanson was out of his bed that morning at an unusually early hour, and at six o'clock was down at Swarthington and in Marris's farmyard. Two or three young labourers, gathered about a stable-door, stared at him in astonishment as he advanced on them.

"Your master anywhere about?" asked Hanson. "Is he up yet?"

The lads looked at each other, and at their questioner, and from him into the interior of the stable. As if in reply to their looking into its depths an older man came out of the shadows. He had evidently heard Hanson's question, and he shook his head.

"Mr. Marris isn't at home, sir," he replied. "Never came home at all last night. I live in the house, and I sat up for him till past twelve o'clock, but he never turned up."

"And you don't know where he is, I suppose?" inquired Hanson.

"I don't, sir. Mr. Marris, he went off to a sale, the other side of Withington yesterday morning, and he's not been home since. Haines, he says

that he went there for him in the afternoon, and saw him there—that's the last I've heard about him. He certainly never came home."

"Where is Haines?" asked Hanson.

The man turned to one of the lads.

"Show this gentleman where Haines lives," he said. "It's not far, sir—just behind the Plough-boy."

Hanson followed the lad across the road and round the corner of the inn to a cottage standing in a trimly-kept garden.

"That's Haines's place, mister," said the lad. "I don't know if they'll be up yet—Haines, he doesn't come to his work much before seven o'clock."

But Hanson noticed that the blinds were up in the cottage windows, and smoke trailing gaily from its chimney, and as he walked up the garden path the door opened and revealed an elderly woman, who watched him approach with evident anxiety in her face.

"Mrs. Haines?" he inquired.

"The same, sir! I hope you've brought no bad news of my husband, sir? I'm that anxious——"

"I have no news, Mrs. Haines! I came to see if he was here."

"He's not, sir! I don't know where Haines is! Haines, he's in an awful state about this affair over at Mr. Marris's. Are you the police-superintendent, sir?"

"I am!" replied Hanson. "What can you tell me, Mrs. Haines?"

"Well, sir, little. Haines, after you'd been here yesterday and taken the young missis away, he got a horse and rode to find Mr. Marris. He found him and told him; then, I believe he rode on to Norlanstead to see you. He came home, and told me that Mr. Marris hadn't gone to Norlanstead when he got there. And he got restless, and said he must get hold of Mr. Marris again and persuade him to go to the police, and he took the horse and went off again, and he's never been back. That would be five o'clock in the afternoon, sir, when he went off the second time. I cannot think where he is! I went over to the Crossways Farm several times last night, but neither Mr. Marris nor Haines had come back the last time I was there, and that was past eleven o'clock."

"Very strange—that both should be missing," said Hanson. He stood silently thinking for a minute, then, regarding the woman steadily, he continued: "Mrs. Haines, your husband knows something about this affair, doesn't he?"

Mrs. Haines showed signs of hesitation.

"Did he say as much to you, sir?" she asked.

"He did, but he wouldn't say what it was, until he'd seen Marris."

Mrs. Haines made no reply to that, and presently Hanson spoke again.

"You know, Mrs. Haines, it'll all have to come

out!" he said. "If Haines knows anything that relates to the murder, he ought to tell—especially if it's anything that would clear Mrs. Marris. Mrs. Marris and her brother are in a dangerous position—they'll be brought up before the magistrates this morning on a charge of murder."

Mrs. Haines winced.

"Haines does know something, sir!" she said hurriedly. "He does!"

"Do you?" asked Hanson.

"Well, sir, I know what Haines knows! Haines and me, sir, we've no secrets."

"What is it, then, Mrs. Haines? Why not tell me?"

"No, sir! I shall tell nothing without my husband's leave! Not for anything, sir, so don't ask me."

"And he won't say anything until he's seen Marris!" said Hanson. "It's a mistake, Mrs. Haines! If Haines and you know something, anything, about this affair, you're bound to tell!"

"That's for Haines to decide, sir! Haines, I'm sure, is after his master, and where his search may have taken him, I don't know. But I should say that Mr. Marris'll surely come to his wife's assistance—he's a bad man if he doesn't! As for me, sir, I can't say more."

She turned away as if desirous of closing the conversation, but Hanson motioned her to wait.

"Just a question, Mrs. Haines! Whatever it is

that you and Haines know—how long have you known it?" he asked. "Since—when?"

"Ever since the news came about that poor woman being found, sir!"

"You should have come to me at once then," said Hanson. "You'd have saved a lot of trouble."

"I don't know that we should, sir, and you don't know, either, for you don't know what it is!" replied Mrs. Haines, spiritedly. "You'll excuse me, now, sir. I think you'll perhaps find Haines at Norlanstead, and Mr. Marris, too, I hope."

She went into her cottage and shut the door, and Hanson turned back to his car, sorely puzzled. What was it that Haines knew, and that his wife knew, and that they wouldn't tell without Marris's permission? He was beginning to fear that he was once again on the wrong track—but he went home to his breakfast resolved to persevere in it. Even if it were the wrong track, it might suddenly twist away into the right one.

Cordukes came to him just before he was going to the Magistrates' Court—shaking his head.

"I've seen them both again this morning," said Cordukes. "They're a queer couple, that brother and sister, and the lad's no fool!—he's much more intelligence than most young men of his class."

"The mother's intelligent enough!" growled Hanson. "Whether she puts her intelligence to good use is another matter. Well!—anything fresh?"

Cordukes shook his head in a puzzled way.

"No! The young woman's bitter, very bitter, this morning, because her husband hasn't turned up to do anything for her," he replied. "Where is Marris?—have you heard anything of him?"

Hanson told of his morning's adventure at Swarthington; Cordukes looked his surprise.

"Tell you what it is, Hanson!" he exclaimed. "There's something damned queer about this case! You're off the track in regard to these two young people! However, I suppose you're going on with it—can't do much else, can you?"

"I'm going on!" said Hanson, determinedly. "If they know who is guilty and won't tell, they're accessories—that's my view of it. I'm going on—in the hope of bringing something out."

"Well, I shall appear for them, though there's really nothing to do, at present," said Cordukes. "What's your programme?"

"Short!" said Hanson. "Evidence of their arrest and a request for a remand."

"Five minutes' job!" remarked Cordukes. "All right!"

He went away, and Hanson presently repaired to the Magistrates' Court, and found it packed with inquisitive people, townsfolk and villagers. There was a full bench of magistrates; a big attendance of the local legal profession; every nook and corner of the place was crammed; men stood in the windows. But he could not see Haines anywhere in

the crowd, nor did he succeed in finding Marris's face, though he searched everywhere for it.

Anne Marris came into the dock in the white linen in which Hanson had found her making up her butter; Matthew Clay, a moment later, appeared in the Sunday-best garments in which Hanson and Skelton had found him at his mother's cottage. From the instant in which brother and sister met they took no notice of anything that went on in court. They immediately began to whisper to each other; when charged they flung a careless negative at the clerk and resumed their whispering. But at the first mention of a remand Matthew suddenly turned his attention to the magistrates and stretched out an appealing hand to the chairman.

"Can I say a word, if you please, sir?" he asked respectfully.

The chairman glanced at Cordukes; then at Hanson. Neither responding, he looked doubtfully at the prisoner.

"What do you wish to say?" he inquired.

"I want to ask a question, sir," replied Matthew.

The chairman, an elderly country-gentleman, looked puzzled; plainly, this seemed irregular, perhaps indecorous, in his opinion. He glanced at the clerk; the clerk nodded.

"Well?" said the chairman. "What is your question?"

Matthew got nearer the front of the dock and gripped the rail. He looked round with an ingenuous smile.

"There's a lot o' lawyers here!" he answered. "I want to know something! Something that has a deal to do with—with the position me and my sister is in: It's this—Is it a fact that if a man's found guilty of murder, all his money and property goes to the Government? Tell me that, if you please!"

A dead silence fell on the court—broken suddenly by a light, suppressed laugh from somebody at the solicitors' table in the centre. The legal men there knew well enough what Matthew Clay had in mind—there is still amongst the English rustic populations a confirmed belief that the property of a convicted felon is forfeit to the Crown. But—how was this belief affecting Matthew's mind in relation to the charge against himself?

Once more the chairman had recourse to the magistrates' clerk. And the clerk looked at Matthew sympathetically and smiled, shaking his head.

"No, Clay!" he said. "It's not a fact! Such a man's property would pass to those he'd left it to!"

Matthew grew still more alert.

"Is that the law, mister?" he asked. "No mistake?"

"That's the law!" replied the clerk.

Matthew turned suddenly and whispered to his sister. Nobody interrupted him; magistrates, officials, and public looked on as if conscious that something unusual was happening. And Anne listened and nodded, and Matthew twisted round to the chairman once more.

"If you please," he began, and paused, and receiving no check, went on again. "If you please, if so be as you could put this job off for an hour or so, to let me and my sister have a talk to one another, and maybe to Mr. Cordukes there, we shall very likely decide to tell all we know about that affair in the Castle! But—we must talk it out first!"

Amidst a general murmur of excitement, the chairman bent towards Hanson, in the well of the court.

"Have you any objection, Mr. Superintendent?" he asked. "This seems somewhat irregular, but——"

"No objection whatever, your Worship!" replied Hanson. He might have added that he was delighted—it seemed to him that at last he was going to see daylight. "Whatever your Worship thinks convenient——"

"We'll adjourn the case for an hour," said the chairman. "In the meantime—some other cases, I believe?"

As the brother and sister disappeared from the dock, Hanson edged his way to Cordukes.

"Odd!" he whispered, as he sat down by the solicitor. "Had you any idea of that? No? Well, what on earth does he mean by that question?"

"I understood it!" replied Cordukes. "A lot of these country people believe that if a man's convicted of murder all his property is seized by the Crown. It's a common belief, I assure you! But what that's got to do with this case, I can't think. Young Clay hasn't any property, has he?"

"Saved a bit of money, I think," said Hanson. "But he wasn't thinking of that, I'll warrant! Some deeper notion than that! However——"

A constable came through the crowd to Cordukes's elbow.

"They want you downstairs, Mr. Cordukes," he whispered. "This way, sir!"

"Get 'em to make a clean breast of it!" said Hanson, as the solicitor rose. "Impress on them to keep nothing back!"

He had to give his attention then to another case—of no importance. But as he handled the papers in connection with it, he looked up from them to the man whom they concerned; his gaze suddenly became concentrated on an open doorway at the rear of the court. Through it came Haines—his grey face haggard, weary, and questioning.

CHAPTER XXV

PLAIN TRUTH

Hanson made haste to get rid of the papers in his hands: forcing his way through the crowded court he took Haines by the arm and led him into one of the adjacent rooms. Haines spoke first, giving Hanson a keen glance.

"Has he come?" he asked. "Is he here?"

"Marris? No!" replied Hanson. "We've seen nothing of him. What do you know about him, Haines?"

Haines lifted a hand and wiped the sweat from his forehead.

"I've come here hot-foot!" he said, pantingly. "From home! My wife said you'd been down there—I got back just after you'd gone, master. I—I've been seeking Marris all night!"

"Where?" asked Hanson.

"I went to seek him last night," replied Haines. "Went back to where that sale was, you understand? He'd left there and I traced him to a public-house at Withington. He'd been there, but he'd gone. Then I traced him to another place, a few miles away—he'd been there, too. But he'd gone off, in his car, just before I got there—a man that I met said he'd seen him go in the

Woolsthorpe direction. So I rode on there, and I searched every public in the place, master. He'd been at two—but I lost him. And my horse was done by that time—I had to stop there. You're sure he's not here?"

"He's not in that court," said Hanson. He looked searchingly at Haines, whose anxiety was puzzling him. "You're very much concerned about his coming here, Haines," he continued. "Why?"

"His young missis!" replied Haines. "You've got her—he should stand by her! He was always a hard, cruel man!—but this——"

"Well, you know something," said Hanson. "Why not out with it? Come—your wife told me this morning that you and she both knew something! Tell it, Haines, and be done with it!"

Haines shook his head.

"Them two?" he asked. "The missis—and young Matt? What's being done with 'em, master?"

"They're considering whether they'll tell something—I think," replied Hanson. "They're like you—they know something!"

Haines started. A look of suspicion came into his eyes.

"About—about that night?" he asked. "At the Castle?"

"What else should it be?" said Hanson. "Nothing else would be any good! Come, now—are you going to speak?"

Haines looked down at his feet—a minute went by. When he looked up again there were signs of resolution in his face.

"I'll wait!" he exclaimed. "Wait till I hear what they have to say. They may say what'll make it needless for me——"

A heavy footstep sounded outside the open door and a constable looked in.

"They're back, Superintendent!" he announced, nodding towards the court. "Mr. Cordukes wants you."

"Come this way, Haines," said Hanson. "Stick to me—I'll take you in."

He led Haines through the crowd to a corner near his own seat, and turned to Cordukes. Cordukes bent close to him.

"This lad wants to make a statement!" he whispered. "Wants to make it himself, in his own way. I don't know what it may be—exactly—but I guess it'll come as a surprise. You don't object?"

"I don't object," replied Hanson. "I don't know what the magistrates may say." He glanced at the well-filled bench above them. "Better make your application, hadn't you?"

Cordukes got on his feet and turned to the chairman.

"I have had an opportunity of consulting with my clients, your Worship," he said. "My client

Matthew Clay wishes, with your Worship's permission to—well, to use his own words—to tell you all about it! I don't know what it is he wishes to tell, but he and his sister are very anxious that he should tell it—now, in this court. It is at your Worship's discretion——"

The chairman looked doubtfully at his brother magistrates and from them to the clerk of the court.

"This means a very irregular proceeding, Mr. Cordukes," he said. "I really don't know——" He paused, spoke for a while with his left and right hand neighbours on the bench, and then beckoned the clerk, with whom he had a short exchange of whispers. Eventually, he looked across at the dock at the front of which the brother and sister stood intently watching him. "What is it you wish to do, Clay?" he asked.

"Tell all me and my sister knows about it!" answered Matthew promptly.

"Do you wish to tell whatever it is you have to tell in denial of the charge preferred against you?" asked the chairman.

"I don't quite understand that," said Matthew. "I want to tell the plain truth about me and my sister being in the Castle Grounds that night. What we saw and heard, sir."

The chairman once more spoke with his brother magistrates. Hanson, watching them closely, saw

that their curiosity was by that time as keen as his own. Presently the chairman turned again to the dock.

"Very well, Clay!" he said. "Say what you have to say!"

Matthew looked round the court, fixing his attention at last on the magistrates. Amidst a tense silence, he began to speak.

"Much obliged to you!" he said. "Well, it's like this, as near as I can put it. Me and my sister here—there seems to be an idea that one of us, or both of us put an end to that woman! It's all wrong!—we neither of us laid a finger to her! It's a cruel thing that we're here—and it's all the fault of my sister's husband, Marris!"

He paused for an instant, as a murmur fluttered amongst the women in the court; when he went on again his voice grew more confident.

"Marris—he wed my sister, and they'd not been married a year when he started to neglect her! Then this woman came at Holly Bank, and he was always running after her, sitting with her at nights, and taking her about in his motor-car. I had a row with him myself, and he got rid of me. It went on till everybody in Swarthington knew about it. My mother told him her mind about it, but he's a man, is Marris, that cares for naught and nobody—he's all for having his own way, Marris——"

"Come to the facts, Clay!" interrupted the

chairman. "You wished to speak of your doings on a certain night."

"I'm coming to it, sir," said Clay, "but I can't keep Marris's name out! You'll find that comes in!—me and my sister have been for keeping it out as long as we could, but seeing as he's never come forward to stand by her, we can't keep it out any longer. Well, on that Tuesday night—Tuesday night of last week—I was in here at Norlanstead, and I met my sister and had a talk with her. She told me that the night before, she'd followed Marris to this woman's house at Holly Bank and had waited at a side door to see if she could hear anything said between them when he came out. She hid amongst some bushes, where they couldn't see her, and she did hear something! She heard 'em settle to meet next night on the terrace outside the Castle at half-past nine. And, of course, when she met me, she told me that."

Clay paused for a moment, glancing at his sister as if in corroboration. But Anne was staring straight in front of her, at the magistrates, and he went on.

"I said to her that that sort of thing had got to be put a stop to, one way or another, and that we'd go down there, to the Castle, and if we could see this woman before Marris came, I'd tell her, straight out, that she'd got to leave my sister's husband alone! My sister, she didn't want to go, but I made her. We went—we got down there a

bit before the time that those two were to meet, and we went through a place where the wall's broken down into the Castle Grounds and waited awhile. While we were waiting we heard a motor-car coming down the road from the town, beneath the Castle Terrace. It stopped at where there's a path that comes up to the terrace. And next thing we heard Marris and that woman coming our way and talking. We hadn't heard her, or seen aught of her before, and I can't say where she'd met him—most likely down that path—but there they were, anyway, coming into those grounds by the same way that we'd got in. And they passed close by a bit of the old ruins that we'd slipped into, and as they passed us they were talking—at least, she was talking, and I heard what she said, plain, and I can tell you every word of it!—it wasn't much."

Once more he paused, and once again glanced at Anne Marris—but Anne continued to stare straight in front.

"She was talking—that woman!" repeated Clay. "And what I heard her say was this—they're her very words! 'It's no use, Marris!' she said. 'I've told him this afternoon that I'll marry him, we're going to be married at once. So there it is!' That's what she said. He said naught, Marris—at least, if he did, he said it after they'd passed on, and I didn't catch it. I watched 'em—they went across through the shrubberies towards

the old tower—keep, they call it. And I said to my sister, 'Did you hear that, Anne?' I said. 'She says she's going to be wed to somebody!' 'Yes, I heard it!' Anne says. 'Well, then,' I says, 'she'll be clearing out of Swarthington, most like, and you'll be rid of her.' 'What's it got to do with him whether she weds or not,' says Anne. 'And what have they gone in there for?' 'Oh, never mind 'em!' I says. 'Now that you've heard that, let's go! She's going to get a man of her own,' I says. 'No!' says Anne. 'What's she doing with mine?—I'll not go!' However, I persuaded her, after a bit, and we went out on the terrace again. But Anne wouldn't go away till we'd seen if this woman went off with Marris in his car, so we got behind some bushes at the side of the walk going down to the road and watched and waited for 'em coming away."

Matthew suddenly paused and, bending towards his sister, whispered a question to her. A hard, bitter look came over Anne Marris's face, and she nodded—slowly but with emphasis. And Matthew faced the magistrates again and went on.

"Well!—we didn't want to say, but there's naught else for it, now!" he continued. "It would be a good quarter of an hour before we heard anything coming. Then we heard somebody—hurry-like. Then Marris came running down the path, all alone! He was talking and muttering to himself—I couldn't make out what, but he seemed in a

queer state. He made past us, and down to the road, and into his car—we heard him start it, anyway, and saw the lights go away. And we thought, of course, that this woman had left him up there and gone into the town and home by herself, so we went our own road—Anne knew where my mother would be waiting for her, and I walked up there with her, and we parted. And—that's all that we know! We'd naught whatever to do with that woman's death, neither of us——"

"That will do, Clay!" interrupted the chairman. "We've heard all you had to say and listened with great care." He motioned to the clerk of the court and to Hanson to come up to his desk. "Is anything known of Marris's whereabouts?" he asked of Hanson.

"He's been missing since yesterday afternoon," replied Hanson. "But I'll start a search for him immediately. If these two had only spoken sooner——"

"What about these two?" asked the chairman, looking at the clerk. "We can't——"

"Remand them till to-morrow morning," said the clerk. "By then the police may have found Marris. He'll have to be found, now!" he went on, turning to Hanson. "This is a pretty damning statement we've listened to!"

"Yes," assented Hanson. He waited until the chairman had informed the two prisoners that they would be remanded until next morning, and

then turned to the clerk again. "The thing that puzzles me," he continued, "is—motive! What——"

Before he could say more, Hanson felt a sudden tug at his coat-sleeve, and turning, found Haines at his elbow. Haines's face was set.

"I'll tell now!" he said in a low voice. "He's not come—and I've heard all that that lad said, and I'll tell! It's this, master: You're aware that you found a green clothes-line in our wash-house at Marris's yesterday morning, similar to what was used to put an end to that woman?"

"Yes!" replied Hanson. "And short of a length identical with what was used on her!"

"Well, master, then I tell you the truth! On that Tuesday just before Marris set out for market I was in our back kitchen. Marris came through there and went into the wash-house, leaving the door open; he was sort of grumbling and growling to himself, and heeded me no more than if I'd been a stick or a stone! He took down that there green clothes-line from a hook where the missis had hung it when she brought it home—it had never been used—and he pulled out his knife, cut a length off of it, a good length, and put the length he'd cut off in his overcoat pocket! That's the truth, master!—but knowing it though I did, I couldn't bring myself to believe that Marris was a——"

Haines stopped suddenly. A constable had made

his way through the dispersing crowd and had come close to the superintendent, to whisper. And only Hanson caught the whisper. "Mr. Marris is here! I've put him in your room!"

CHAPTER XXVI

THE GREEN ROPE

Hanson rose to his feet at once and prepared to leave the court.

"Don't go away, Haines!" he said. "Stay about!—come across to the police-station; I shall want some more talk with you."

Haines nodded—involuntarily he laid a detaining hand on the superintendent's arm and looked at him with eyes full of inquiry.

"Marris?" he said. "I heard what your man said! What—what shall you do with him? If he knew I'd told——"

"Leave it to me," replied Hanson. "You're all right. I'll see to it."

He hurried out into the street—to find a crowd of excited people at the door, and in the middle of it Sabina Clay, furious with anger, haranguing Cordukes, who was vainly endeavouring to get away from her.

"Call yourself a lawyer!" she was shouting. "I'd ha' seen you damned first before I paid my money to a fellow like you!—if I'd known you could do no better than that! Nice sort o' lawyer you are, to let my lad go telling all that stuff to them magistrates! Why didn't you counsel him

and my lass to keep their mouths shut? They couldn't ha' made 'em speak, and nobody 'ud ha' known aught then! Now all the world knows, and Marris'll get to know, and he'll go and make another will, and my lass'll get naught!—all because you advised 'em to tell what they knew."

"My good woman!" began Cordukes. "You don't——"

But Hanson had forced his way through the crowd and laid a stern hand on the angry woman's shoulder.

"Now, Mrs. Clay!" he said firmly, "you go away at once before you get into trouble! Go!" he continued, pushing her away. "You'll find yourself locked up if you don't! Here!" he added, beckoning to a policeman who stood near. "See this woman off—if she doesn't go, take her in custody!"

Sabina went—muttering. A section of the crowd followed her along the street, and Hanson turned to Cordukes.

"She'll go and vent her rage in some public-house now!" he said grimly. "We shall be having her in charge before the day's out. What did she mean about a will?"

Cordukes made a grimace.

"These people have such queer ideas about law!" he said. "You know that question Matthew Clay put this morning—about what became of a convicted murderer's property? They were fright-

ened that if they told anything that would lead to Marris's conviction his money would go to the Government and his widow wouldn't get anything! When they found it wasn't so, they gave him away! Well!—here's been a revelation, Hanson! Of course, Marris murdered that woman! But—why?"

"I see it!" replied Hanson. "I mayn't be very brilliant, Cordukes, but I saw it almost before that lad had got half through his tale! You remember what he heard the woman say as she and Marris passed them? *'It's no use, Marris! I've told him this afternoon that I'll marry him; we're going to be married at once. So there it is!'* And—there it is, indeed, Cordukes! Marris murdered Miss Gilkison out of—jealousy! Jealousy of a man he'd never seen! There's no doubt that he was madly in love with that woman, and probably wanted her to run away with him; when he found that she was going to marry another man he killed her!"

"Well!" said Cordukes. "You'll have to get him!"

Hanson turned towards the police-station.

"We've got him!" he said. "He's here now—came of his own will. Come across, Cordukes—he's in my room."

He led the astonished solicitor across the street and through the corridors of the police-station to his own private office at the rear. Nearing its door he paused and whispered.

"I don't suppose Marris knows anything of what's been said or done in court!" he remarked. "It'll come as a surprise to him! He's probably come here thinking that nothing's known—it'll never have entered his head that he's been given away—besides, he's no idea, as far as I'm aware, that his wife and her brother saw him in the Castle Grounds that night. So—but come in."

He opened the door of the office suddenly and walked in, Cordukes at his heels. And on the instant each let out an exclamation of surprise. For the room was empty!

"Not here!" said Cordukes.

"He was here!—my man said he put him here!" muttered Hanson. He turned hastily down the corridor again, calling for the constable who had come across to the court for him. "Here, Wilson!" he said as the man came out of a room near the entrance. "Where is Mr. Marris? You said——"

"He's in your room, sir," replied the constable, suddenly surprised. "I showed him in there, sir, to wait while I went across to tell you."

"He's not there now!" said Hanson, showing his vexation. "He's gone, confound it! How did he come here?"

The constable, a youthful-looking member of the force, evidently considerably taken aback by this unexpected happening, pointed to the front entrance.

"I was at the door, sir, when he came," he answered. "He came across from the court—I saw him come out of the side door there, and——"

"From the court!" exclaimed Hanson. "You're sure?"

"Certain, sir! I was looking in that direction. He came straight across here, sir, and said he wanted to see you. He remarked that he knew you were in court—would I step over and tell you that a gentleman wanted to see you when convenient. I showed him into your room, sir—of course, I didn't know him!"

"You didn't know him?" said Hanson.

"No, sir! I come from another part of the county, you see, sir. Never seen him before that I'm aware of, sir."

"Well?" asked Hanson, impatiently. "What then?"

"I asked him his name, sir. He told me—Mr. Marris. Then I went straight across to you. I came back here and went on with my duties, sir. I never saw him leave the station, sir."

"He's gone out by that back entrance!" muttered Hanson. He looked at Cordukes, doubtfully. "What puzzles me is—was Marris really in court? I never saw——"

An elderly policeman, carrying an armful of books and papers, paused in passing, and looked from the superintendent to Cordukes, and back again.

"Mr. Marris was in court, sir!" he said. "I saw him! He was in that dark corner under the balcony—he came in just before young Clay made that statement."

"And was there the whole time?" demanded Hanson. He made a gesture of vexation and beckoned Cordukes back to his room. "What the devil does it mean?" he exclaimed. "If he heard all that, he'd know—and yet he comes across here, wanting me, and then clears out. Hallo, what's this?"

He had reached his desk in the middle of the room by that time; a second later he had snatched up and was holding out to Cordukes a sheet of paper on which a line or two had been scribbled in a spreading handwriting:

"Come down to the Castle, Hanson; you'll be saved a lot of trouble!"

For one moment the two men stared into each other's eyes; in the next, Hanson had seized his companion's arm and was dragging him towards the door.

"Come on—come on!" he exclaimed. "My car's outside—come!"

The people still hanging about the streets stared as they saw Hanson and Cordukes careering at a furious pace in the direction of the Castle; Roberts, the caretaker, stared as Hanson

drove into the grounds and leaped out on him with a sharp inquiry.

"Have you seen Marris come in here?" demanded Hanson. "No!—well, he is here somewhere! Look round—go that way—we'll go this!"

He began to run around the ruins, peering here, there, and everywhere, aimlessly. Ten minutes went by: then Roberts called from the corner of the keep.

"Mr. Hanson—here!"

He drew back as the two men hurried up, pointing into the recesses of the grim old stronghold. It was almost dark there, but a sudden gleam of the sun revealed Marris. . . .

"Good God!" shouted Hanson. "He's hanged himself with the rope he strangled the woman with! He must have found it on my desk—I left it lying there this morning!"

A NOTE ON THE TYPE IN WHICH THIS BOOK IS SET

This book is set on the Linotype in DeVinne, a Modern type face. The Modern faces are sharply drawn with an almost mathematical exactness and are designed for use on hard, smooth-surfaced papers in contrast with the Old Style faces which are more freely drawn and were originally designed for use on the softer hand-made sheets. DeVinne, alone among the Moderns, has a most interesting character when used on antique papers, and is frequently used with them. The Modern types were first made about 1790 and, becoming immensely popular, were soon grossly distorted, each typefounder trying to outdo his competitors by exaggerating the Modern characteristics. It was not until late in the nineteenth century that the Modern type was brought back to a useful sanity of design, largely through the influence of the great American printer Theodore Low DeVinne, in whose honor this type face was named.

SET UP, ELECTROTYPED, AND PRINTED BY THE VAIL-BALLOU PRESS, INC., BINGHAMTON, N. Y. · PAPER FURNISHED BY REESE & REESE, BALTIMORE, MD. · BOUND BY H. WOLFF ESTATE, NEW YORK.

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